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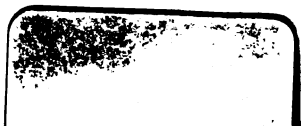


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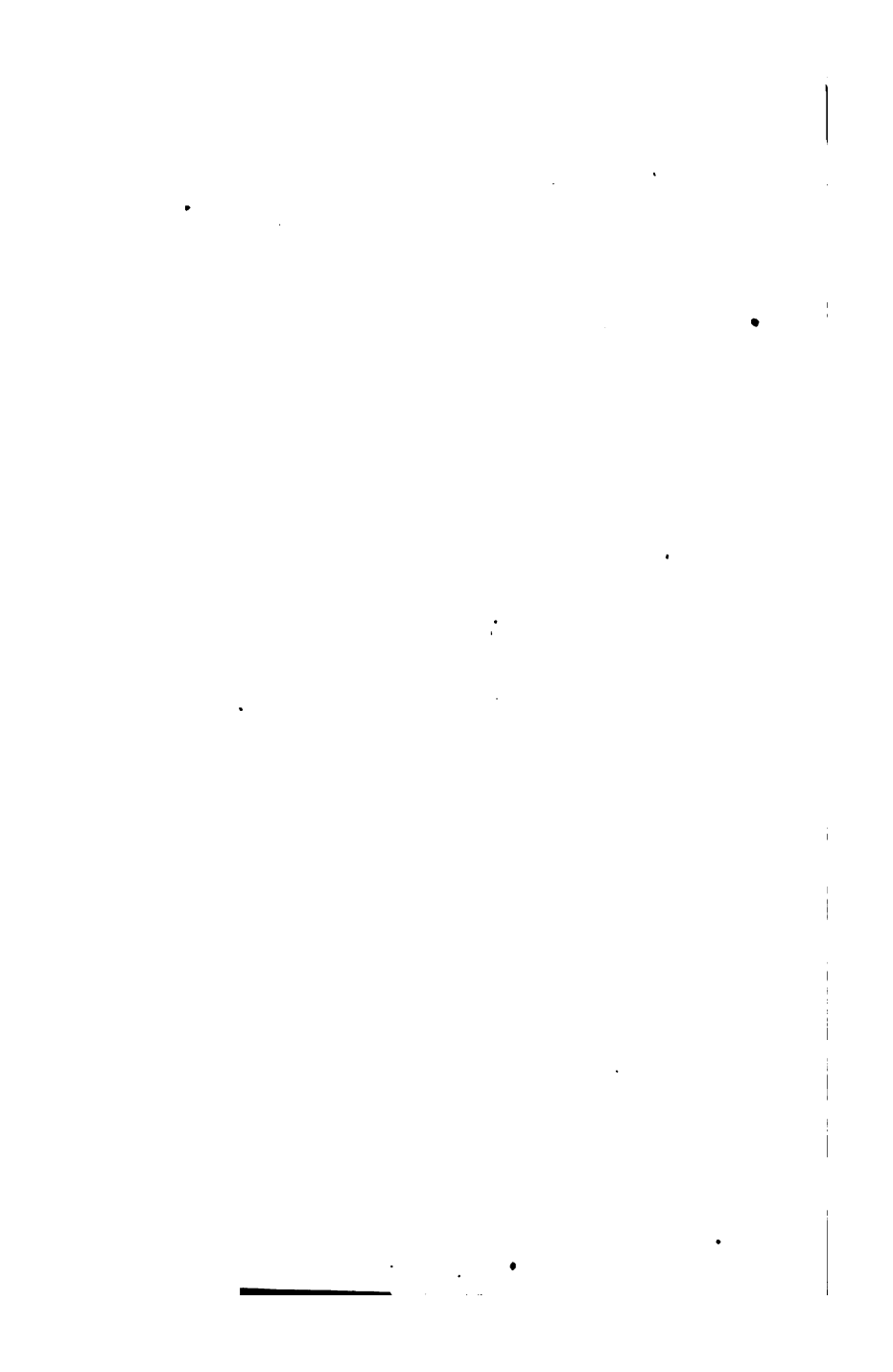




DIVINE LOVE;

OR,

THE MAN OF SORROWS.



DIVINE LOVE;
OR,
THE MAN OF SORROWS.

BY
M. A. DICKSON.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. . . . The chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isai. liii. 6, 5.)

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TO

LADY DYKE,

(OF LULLINGSTONE CASTLE, KENT.)

This Volume

IS INSCRIBED,

AS A TRIBUTE OF AFFECTION,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

is too limited to form any just conception of his unparalleled propitiatory sufferings. We can only wonder and adore Him, for his infinite benevolence and magnanimity; love Him for his goodness; and rejoice in Him with thanksgiving, as an all-sufficient Saviour.

Josephus and Calmet are the authorities from whence are derived all allusions to Oriental customs. The descriptions of places favoured with the Saviour's presence, and of the scenery which sometimes surrounded Him in his journeys, have been supplied from modern travels in Palestine.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

“ Ere the bright orbs, their morning accents sung,
Or heaven’s high arches with the echoes rung,
Ere time began, or nature rose to birth,
Through skies and seas—mid air or lesser earth;
Christ’s kingdom form’d—e’er sin its course began,
With hosts angelic, or the breast of man.
His kingdom shall endure—his reign extend,
When time in an eternity shall end.”

Six thousand years ago, this earth, which now teems with life, was a mere chaos, until by the omnipotent fiat of the triune Creator it was clothed with verdure, adorned with the floral charms of the first spring, and fitted for the residence of living and intelligent beings. We learn from the discoveries of natural philosophy, that before it was created, Infinite Wisdom had provided a system of adaptation, in the constitution and instincts of plants and animals to a diversity of soil and climate; also that there had been devised a skilful accommodation of inanimate

substances to the well-being of animated nature, and of the intellectual creatures God designed to bring into existence. Thence it may be inferred from the deductions of reason and analogy, that the magnanimous scheme of man's everlasting salvation was also prospectively devised, even were the fact not revealed in the Bible, and proved by experience. From these we learn, that before all worlds, the triune Jehovah had settled that an innumerable company of sinners should be brought to glory and immortality, secured in Jesus Christ as their everlasting head and surety, against all the hostile endeavours of Satan to lead them to perdition.

It transcends all the powers of imagination, to form any adequate conception of the gracious motives, benevolent influences, and unquenchable affection, which swayed his mind, when He agreed to an undertaking involving the most extreme hardship, anguish, and degradation. Yet, such was his ardent zeal for the honour of the Divine attributes, such his incomprehensible love, generous self-devotion, and expansive philanthropy, that no consideration of the dreadful sacrifices involved in his engagement, could shake his determination to become the surety of his people. "All that the Father" then "gave" Him, He resolved to cleanse from every spot of moral defilement with his own all-atoning blood, and to clothe them in the robe of his own justifying righteousness:—

"Whom shall I send!" the Father cries,
"Lo, I am here," the Son replies:
"I'll veil my glories all divine,
And to mine own, man's nature join,
That bright in glory he may shine
To endless day."

The Scriptures abound with evidences of the Saviour's pre-existence as God, in his visits to the patriarchs, prophets, and other chosen instruments of the Divine goodness. On those occasions, He appears sometimes to have assumed the form of a man, or angel under the veil of humanity; and often to have spoken in a human voice, without rendering himself visible.

His mission of mercy began in paradise, when He infused the balm of consolation into the souls of our first parents, and revealed to them an outline of the Divine scheme of redemption, in that concise prediction,—“The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head,”—the germ of all subsequent prophecies, which has now grown and expanded into a tree of life, whose “leaves” are for the “healing of the nations:”—a promise peculiarly calculated to soothe the pangs of self-reproach incident to their fallen condition, and to mitigate their regret when constrained to quit paradise, which was blessed with a pure and vital climate, decorated with scenery of transcendent beauty, and honoured with the special presence of the triune Creator.

The everlasting covenant into which the Lord entered with Noah, after the waters of the deluge had subsided, was typical of "better things." And to prepare the way for the accomplishment of human redemption, therein implied, He subsequently constrained the descendants of that patriarch to disperse, and emigrate to different countries. In process of time He called Abraham to abandon his native home in Chaldea, with which all his earliest and tenderest affections were associated, and to sojourn as a stranger and pilgrim in the land of Canaan, which He promised to bestow on his posterity, as the chosen locality of his Divine incarnation. On one glorious evening, while the sun was sinking behind the western hills, and Abraham was asleep in his tent, on the verdant plain of Mamre, He appeared to him in a vision; and while He soothed his fears by the assurance,—“I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,” promised that he should be the father of a spiritual family, as innumerable as the stars which twinkle in the firmament, or as the grains of sand that densely cover the shores of the expansive ocean.

It was God the Son, who, at the earnest supplication of Jacob, condescended to remain with him a whole night, upon the shady banks of the river Jabbok; where weeping willows still lave their branches in its consecrated waters; and olean-

ders, with their pink and white blossoms, recal to memory the most precious of all the Divine attributes. There He graciously suffered himself to be detained, till the rising sun lighted up the neighbouring mountains; when He revealed the Father's love, and refreshed the patriarch's weary spirit, though from such near contact to the Godhead his physical frame did not altogether escape injury.

"Come, O thou traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee:
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

"I need not tell thee who I am,
My misery and sin declare,
Thyself hast called me by my name,—
Look on thy hands, and read it there:
But who, I ask thee,—who art thou?
Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

"Wilt thou not yet to me reveal,
Thy new unutterable name?
Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell!
To know it now resolved I am,
Wrestling I will not let thee go,
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

"Yield to me now, for I am weak;
But confident in self-despair:
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak;
Be conquer'd by my instant prayer:
Speak, or thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if thy name is Love.

" 'Tis Love ! 'tis Love ! thou'lt die for me,
 I hear thy whisper in my heart ;
 The morning breaks, the shadows flee :
 Pure, universal love thou art.
 To me, to all, thy bowels move,
 Thy nature and thy name is Love.

" My prayer hath power with God : the grace
 Unspeakable I now receive,
 Through faith I see thee face to face,
 I see thee face to face and live.
 In vain I have not wept and strove ;
 Thy nature and thy name is Love." *

In patriarchal times, the prophet Job testified to the glorious fact of the Saviour's Divine pre-existence, and expressed a strong faith in the efficacy of his prospective atonement and justifying righteousness,—
 " I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ; and after I shall awake, though this body be destroyed, yet out of my flesh I shall see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." †

It was the Divine Surety of sinners, who appeared to Moses after his flight from Egypt, revealed himself as the eternal self-existent, "*I Am that I Am* ;" ‡ and commissioned him to conduct the Israelites through the sandy desert to the land of their heritage. To achieve their emancipation, He displayed his sovereignty over the elements, over vege-

* Gen. xxxii. 24—30. † Job xix. 25—27. ‡ Exod. iii. 2.

tation, and over the animals, insects, and reptiles which the Egyptians deified, concluding with an awful demonstration of his power over human life, to constrain the obdurate Pharaoh to recognise his supremacy as the God of heaven. When the Israelites were hemmed in between the Red Sea and a range of mountains, He opened a passage for them to the opposite coast between two walls of liquid crystal; and when the hostile troops had entered the channel, He caused the mural waves to rush together with sudden impetuosity, engulfing them all in the depths of the mighty waters. He also guided the Israelites in their circuitous wanderings through the desert, and protected them from the scorching rays of the sun by the intervention of a cloud, which veiled the lustre of his presence by day, and lighted up the darkness of night with the beams of his glory. And when near Mount Horeb they were suffering from intense thirst, He stood upon the rugged rock, and commanded water to rush from its stony cliffs for their relief, causing it to flow after them in copious streams, during their long and wearisome pilgrimage. When they had reached the cloud-mantled Sinai, He gave Moses from thence a code of moral laws, while terrible flashes of lightning gleamed, and tremendous peals of thunder roared from its hoary summit, rendering the exhibition of his Divine presence most awful and impressive. *

* Exod. xiii. 21, xix. 18.

When they were on the confines of Canaan, the Son of God appeared to Joshua, bearing the glittering sword of vengeance, and, as the self-existent Jehovah, demanded from him the same homage which Moses had rendered at the foot of Mount Horeb. It was He also, who with "the countenance of an angel very terrible," announced Samson's birth to the wife of Manoah. Having commanded her to dedicate this promised son, as a Nazarite, the husband implored Him to re-appear, and give them further instructions. He complied, and Manoah, to do Him reverence, spread a peace-offering on a rock, which stood in the field where He vouchsafed his presence; and He manifested his Deity, in majestically ascending in the sacred flame supernaturally kindled upon it, in token of acceptance. Overwhelmed with the sublimity and glory of the spectacle, Manoah exclaimed, in an agony of terror, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." His wife, however, calmed his fears by a counter-acting expression of faith in the Divine goodness, based upon such solid reasoning, as to afford a perpetual remedy for spiritual doubt and despondency,—“If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt-offering at our hand, . . . neither would He as at this time have told us such things as these.”*

It was the Son of God also, who appeared to

* Judges xiii. 17—23.

Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, in heavenly visions, arrayed in ethereal light and beauty,—who was seen by Zechariah among the “myrtle trees,” making intercession for the Hebrew captives,* while they were lamenting with tears their exile in Babylon, with their harps untuned to the songs of Zion, and suspended on the willow trees beside the waters of the Euphrates.

In every period since the creation, there has subsisted in various parts of the earth, “a remnant according to grace,” which refused to bow the knee to Baal.

In ancient times the sacred truths of religion were treasured up in hieroglyphics and symbols; but through the devil’s machinations, aided by man’s natural propensity to honour and adore sensible objects, the ignorant multitude gradually learned to worship the emblems, instead of the thing signified. Thus the world became filled with various idols, from the most diminutive, coarse, and hideous representations in wood and stone, among the savage tribes, up to the exquisitely sculptured images of Greece and Rome, and the fine colossal statues of Nineveh and Egypt, India and China. The form of the cherubim originally placed at the gates of paradise, as an emblem of the Divine presence, was preserved till the deluge, when it was transmitted to posterity, with some alteration, under the name of

* Zech. i. 12.

teraphim. After extending over a portion of the East, it became again changed into those winged figures, of which there are some remains in the British Museum, from the ruins of Nineveh, Egypt, and Babylon.

The Egyptians derived and retained from their founder, Ham, a traditional knowledge of the creation, and of the soul's immortality, which they symbolized by the Scarabens; considering death only as a transition into a state of eternal happiness. The promise made to Adam of an atoning sacrifice for sin, with its animal prefigurations, became widely diffused among all the descendants of Noah. The bull, Apis, worshipped in Egypt, was a corruption of the spotless creatures ordained to typify the immaculate "seed of the woman." And, in imitation of the Jewish transfer of a penitent's sins to the head of the scape-goat, the Egyptian priest laid his hands on the head of Apis, while confessing the transgressions of his votaries.

Josephus mentions an ancient tradition among the sons of Seth—that the world would be destroyed, first by water and afterwards by fire, expecting, no doubt, that it would be superseded by a better and more perfect habitation in eternity.

Still, mankind went on degenerating, till at length a season arrived of the deepest ignorance, wickedness, and impiety; and the wisest philosophers declared that God must either crush or convert and

bring it back to himself and righteousness; and this was the season fixed on in the Divine counsels, for the incarnation of the everlasting Surety of sinners. At the period of His advent, astral worship prevailed among the Parthians, Persians, and other Oriental nations. Idolatry was dominant among the Greeks, Macedonians, and Romans, who invested their false gods with the attributes of revenge and cruelty; or, at best, considered them as impersonations of the moral virtues and abstract mental qualities. Civilization had purified heathenism from some of its most barbarous tendencies; but the Armenians still offered human sacrifices, and the Rhodians celebrated an annual festival with bitter imprecations. All people had been originally instructed concerning the eternal power and Godhead of their Creator, but "they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." *

Still, some glimmerings of the light of truth twinkled here and there among the heathen; the most thoughtful and virtuous felt the vanity and impotency of human efforts to bring about a reformation, and the absolute need of Divine interposition to extricate the world from sin and misery. Two hundred years before Christ's advent, the Old Testament had been translated into Greek at Alexandria, and circulated among the learned. Some mutilated

* Rom. i. 21—25.

fragments of Balaam's prophecies concerning the Star which was to arise out of Jacob, found their way into the Sybilline volumes, held by the Romans in great estimation. The poet Virgil, who belonged to the court of the Emperor Augustus, was acquainted with the writings of Isaiah, whose style he imitated in one of his eclogues,—expressing a belief, that a prince was about to arise, who would extend his empire from one end of the earth to the other. And his advent was a period of peculiar suitableness to the regeneration it was designed to accomplish ; for the Romans had then been permitted to enlarge their dominions, expressly that the Gospel might spread with the greater facility ; though their only object was the extension of their own power and authority. Judea had shared the fate of other nations and become tributary to Rome, but was permitted in some measure to be governed by its own laws ; as the sceptre of Judah was not to fall entirely to the ground, till after the work of redemption had been fully accomplished. Its independence was not quite lost, although Antipater of Idumea had usurped the government, and intruded his son Herod into the tetrarchy of Galilee, who bequeathed the crown of David to his son Archelaus.

From the days of Malachi, who predicted John the Baptist's mission as the Saviour's harbinger, there had been no prophet in Palestine. The Levitical code had become deeply tainted with error, and

obsured by priestcraft; so that a reformer was needed in the spirit and power of Elijah, to prepare the human mind for the Gospel dispensation, which was ordained to supersede the corrupted Jewish economy. The time was come for his being raised up, and as he was to be a Levite, the angel Gabriel was dispatched from heaven, to reveal to the aged priest Zachariah, that his wife Elizabeth, who was also well stricken in years, should, though contrary to the course of nature, give birth to this pre-eminent servant of the Lord our Righteousness. He stood at the right side of the brazen altar in the dimly lighted holy place; and while the incense was ascending in wreaths of perfume, made the important communication. Zachariah beheld with dismay the dazzling appearance of the angel, and though he could not doubt from whence he came, listened to him with incredulity. That he might be convinced of the truth and certainty of the message, he was deprived of the power of speech, till the promise had received its complete fulfilment. Everything transpired according to the revelation made by Gabriel; the child was born in due time, and when circumcised received the name of John, notwithstanding the opposition of some of his relations. They appealed against it to Zachariah as a name unprecedented in his family; but he had no sooner confirmed it in writing, than his tongue was untied, and he broke forth in prophetic strains of praise and thanksgiving. The child grew

up under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and when he had attained to manhood, retired into the deserts, clad in the costume of the ancient prophets, and living upon the locust bean and wild honey. He confined himself to the uninhabited woody and sandy regions, till the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias, when, at the age of thirty, he received his commission to prepare the way of the Lord, as Isaiah and Malachi had predicted,—to level the hills and smooth the rugged places, by denouncing vice, and reproofing the hypocrisy of the teachers of religion; by counteracting the prevailing error, that outward observances were sufficient without holiness of conduct; and by announcing that the Jewish dispensation was about to be superseded by a more spiritual economy.

John's proclamation concerning the Redeemer, so accorded with the general expectation, that all sects and classes submitted to his instructions, confessed their sins, and were baptized in the river Jordan. He at the same time drew a distinction between this symbolical ordinance, and the Messiah's baptism of the Holy Ghost in its enlightening and regenerating influences; who possessed omniscient power to search the heart and detect the most secret wickedness. The Sanhedrim revered John for the austerity of his life, and "all men mused in their hearts whether he was not the Christ," or Elijah "sent from heaven," to restore all things. He replied to a deputation of inquirers, that he was neither the one nor the other:

but a mere sound which dies away in the air as soon as uttered, in comparison of the glorious Saviour, who from his heavenly dignity was so pre-eminent, that he considered himself unworthy to perform the meanest office in his service. *

* Luke i. 5—25, 57—80, iii. 1—18.

CHAPTER I.

“ In heaven a rapturous song was heard,
Of sweet seraphic praise,
When Jesus in our flesh appear'd,
A fallen world to raise.
The theme, the song of joy was new,
To each angelic tongue ;
Swift through the realms of light it flew,
And loud the echo rung.
Down through the portals of the sky
The pealing anthem ran ;
And angels flew with eager joy,
To bear the news to man.”

MEANWHILE the Messiah had been growing up contemporaneously with John the Baptist. For only six months after the angel Gabriel had appeared to Zechariah in the temple, he was again despatched from heaven, to announce the incarnation of one mightier than he, in the family of David, according to God's ancient promise to that sovereign. Joachim was at this time the legal heir to the throne of Judah; but the stem of Jesse had been gradually rendered,

like the trunk of an aged tree stripped of its foliage by many a rude blast, till so shorn of its glory as to be reduced to comparative mediocrity. Thus it was wisely ordained. The promised Divine inheritor of the crown, was coming to establish a spiritual kingdom, and to transfer the sceptre to his own eternal Godhead throne in heaven,—“Thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to kindle meat-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.” *

Joachim, the last lineal descendant of David, had adopted Joseph the son of Jacob, who belonged to a collateral branch of the royal family, and betrothed him to Mary his only daughter, while she was yet a child, retaining her under the parental roof till she became of sufficient age to marry. It was when that period arrived that the angelic messenger, before alluded to, flew down from heaven on the wings of obedience, and entering her apartment, where she was most likely engaged in devout prayer or meditation, he revealed the transcendent power which was speedily to be conferred on her. He introduced the subject with a congratulatory salutation. She listened with amazement, and was filled with alarm at the sight of so glorious a being, but still retained her self-possession. Gabriel speedily tranquillized her

* Jer. xxxiii. 17, 18.

fears, by an explicit declaration, that as the heiress of the promise made to her ancestor, King David, she was to be the mother of the Messiah, who would inherit his throne, and transfer his sceptre into a kingdom of everlasting duration. Mary evidently possessed a cultivated mind and superior understanding; she was doubtless well instructed in the Scriptures. But the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah * were not yet unsealed to her. She argued against the possibility, humanly speaking, of their accomplishment. The celestial visitant answered her objections, by explaining that this Divine Son was not to be born after the ordinary course of nature; but would be made, bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, by the all-creating agency of the Holy Spirit. His humanity was to be derived from her substance, but free from the least taint of that original pollution, which belonged to her as a daughter of Adam. He would be "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." His Deity would be veiled in a tabernacle of clay, which "God the Father" would pitch and not man. He would be that "elect and precious corner-stone cut out without hands," which had been laid in Zion from all eternity. An incarnation worthy of the infinite love and beneficence of the triune Jehovah, who, to save his responsible creatures from perdition, condescended to unite human nature to the Godhead,—

* Isai. vii. 14, Jer. xxxi. 22.

since there was no other way of working out their salvation.

Mary piously acquiesced in the will of God, and to confirm her faith, Gabriel made her acquainted with the approaching birth of her Divine Son's harbinger. This information induced her to repair as soon as possible to Hebron, to confer with Elizabeth, who was her cousin. Having first obtained permission from her father, she proceeded thither as soon as convenient, most probably by one of the caravans which passed at stated periods through Judea. This district is characterized by extreme wildness and grandeur, seeming in some places almost a chaos of craggy mountains broken into narrow defiles, or opening into dreary valleys; and in other parts assuming the appearance of rocky eminences, bearing pretty villages on their summits. After traversing this beautiful country, Mary reached the fertile Hebron, with its fish-ponds glittering in the sunshine, amidst a rich profusion of water-loving palms, pomegranate and fig-trees, smiling corn fields, olive groves and vineyards. Crossing the vale of flowers, she entered the city gates, and proceeded to the house of Elizabeth, who welcomed her as one in whose devout frame of mind she could sympathize most cordially. And, under the influence of Divine inspiration, she there sweetly recognised her important and superior calling, and rejoiced in the certain

happy results of the Divine incarnation. Full of the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Mary responded in that beautiful song of thanksgiving, which from Sabbath to Sabbath is re-echoed by millions of worshippers in the national Church of the British Empire. As St. Luke is said to have obtained it immediately from herself, when he inserted it in his Gospel, she no doubt committed it to writing while it was fresh in her memory.

As the time approached for the celebration of Mary's nuptials, Joseph was necessarily much perplexed how to act towards her consistently with duty, but "the angel of the Lord" unfolded the mystery of the Divine incarnation to him in a vision. He sufficiently comprehended the ancient prophecies, to understand that the promised seed of the woman must spring in a direct line from his ancestor David; and he rejoiced in the prospect of being the reputed father of the Messiah. His scruples were now entirely removed; he therefore immediately espoused his betrothed bride, and took her to his home in Nazareth, where she lived in consecrated separation from him, till after the birth of Jesus.

It was customary in those days, for a newly married woman to occupy some of her leisure hours in embroidering a mantle or wrapper to fold her first-born child in at its birth; and, therefore, she probably employed herself during this holy season of

retirement, in working one, and ornamenting it with appropriate devices.*

Before the birth of Jesus, Joseph was constrained by God's overruling providence to repair with Mary to Bethlehem, the city of her inheritance, to enrol their names as Roman subjects. An imperial decree had been issued by Augustus, commanding Cyrenius, who was then censor and afterwards governor of Syria, to levy a territorial impost on all the landed proprietors of Judea. This was an important event, as it marked the Messiah's birth to be coeval with the falling of Judah's sceptre, in "the days" of the fourth monarchy. And the registration brought to light his mother's lineal descent from David, and his consequent title as her first-born Son to the throne of Judah.

On their arrival at Bethlehem, they repaired to the Khan—an open square building containing several apartments; but finding them all preoccupied, were constrained to seek a lodging in the covered avenue behind it. Here they found an empty grotto or cave, usually appropriated to cattle, but in which travellers were sometimes accommodated. It was now about the time of the winter solstice, when the vegetable kingdom was divested of much of its beauty; and no sooner was Mary established under that humble roof, than, in this dreary season, the Son of God entered the world, a helpless babe; was

* Calmet.

wrapped in the mantle prepared for Him, and laid in a stone trough or hollow scooped out of the rock, and used for fodder.

Intense was the sensation produced among the celestial sanctities, when this great mystery of godliness, which they had for ages desired to look into, was thus manifested. And down they hastened from their mansions in the skies, preceded by the angel of the Lord, to behold the most stupendous display of infinite love and condescension that could have occurred in the universe! With the joy and satisfaction peculiar to their benevolent nature, they contemplated the heavenly babe, whom they were commanded henceforth to worship as God incarnate; who had condescended to assume the external form of infancy, in order that by passing through the successive stages of humanity to years of maturity, He might raise his redeemed people to holiness and immortality.

Gabriel communicated the first tidings of this glorious advent to a band of shepherds, who were guarding their flocks on the grassy plains to the south of Bethlehem; where still flows that fountain of delicious water, which David longed to drink of as symbolical of the living streams of salvation. While he was directing them to the grotto, an immense multitude of the heavenly hosts joined him in a rapture of delight at the goodness and condescension of the Son of God,—filling the atmo-

sphere with such harmonious songs of congratulation, as rendered the skies vocal with their melody.

“ O wonder of wonders, astonish'd I gaze,
To see in the manger the Ancient of days;
And angels proclaiming the stranger forlorn,
And telling the shepherds that Jesus is born.”

And transcendently lovely was the scene, as well in nature as in grace, which that sacred locality presented, when the morning star of salvation had ascended above the moral horizon. Bethlehem picturesquely couched on the rocky slope which descends into the vale of Hermon;—the green lowlands, where the shepherds were pasturing their flocks, decked with the lingering wild-flowers of autumn;—the landscape—over-canopied with the transparent deep blue arch of heaven, and spangled with golden stars, the lustre of which was augmented by the presence of the celestial sanctities,—must have afforded a beautiful spectacle. When the highly-favoured shepherds had beheld the infant Lord of life in the grotto, they returned home, publishing abroad the supernatural evidences they had witnessed of Messiah's advent, and the news speedily reached the court of Herod.

Being a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh, the holy child received the rite of circumcision, as a debtor to fulfil the law, when He was named Jesus. At the expiration of forty days, Mary carried Him to Jerusalem, to make the accustomed

offering in the temple. Under Joseph's fostering care they privately issued forth through the deep gateway of Bethlehem at early dawn, and descending the adjoining ridge, struck across the rich plain of Ephraim, and passed the tomb of Rachel. As they drew nearer to the holy city, the white marble temple, recently restored and beautified by Herod, must have gradually displayed its golden front pinnacles and gilded cedar roofs, reflecting back the splendours of the sun, which had risen above the mountains of Arabia. Crossing the valley of Hinnom, they ascended the heights of Zion, and entered within the cloistered walls, and through the court of the Gentiles, where they beheld the lofty gates of the sacred edifice hung with splendid tapestry, and the immense golden clusters of the vine, which adorned their exquisitely sculptured columns. Then, ascending by a flight of steps to the court of the women, Mary presented the turtle doves, which typified the sacrifice Jesus was come to make for the purification of sinners. It was at that critical moment, that Simeon and Anna came in under the influences of the Holy Ghost; and beheld their incarnate God, with gratitude and holy rapture. Simeon gave utterance to his feelings in an inspired hymn, and foretold the persecutions and sufferings the holy child would have to sustain, from the cruel hostility of a corrupt priesthood, and Mary's heart-piercing sorrows as a mother, sympathizing in his afflictions.

In accordance with his infinite benevolence and mercy, God did not leave the Gentiles without a witness of the glorious event which had transpired in Bethlehem. That the expectation of a Messiah then prevailed in the East, is confirmed by Suetonius and Tacitus. Balaam's prophecy, that "a star and a sceptre should rise out of Jacob," was known in Mesopotamia, and most likely in Arabia; and Persia could not be ignorant of Daniel's heavenly visions. The intelligence of God's unspeakable gift was therefore communicated to the Magi of one of those countries, by a luminous sign in the firmament, most probably while they were engaged in making astronomical observations. When they saw this new blazing star rise above the horizon, they knew that from its peculiar situation and lustre, it indicated the Redeemer's advent. Under a Divine impulse, therefore, they set out for Palestine towards which it pointed, and continuing day and night hung out in the middle region of the air, it guided them like the pillar of fire in the desert, till they reached Jerusalem, where they stopped to confer with Herod on their interesting embassy. As men of distinction, in their own country, they proceeded without ceremony, to the splendid palace which that prince had built for himself, between the towers of Marianne and Phasacelis, on Mount Zion. Passing through gardens and groves of the choicest trees and shrubs, and under beautifully-ornamented porticoes, they

entered the palace, and made known the object of their visit. Herod received them in a manner suitable to their rank ; but his jealous fears were roused, lest his son Archelaus should be hereafter dethroned by the lawful heir of the royal house of David. In much tribulation, therefore, he immediately summoned a council of Rabbis, and commanded the Scriptures to be strictly searched, as to the birthplace of the Messiah. They obeyed, and brought to light the prophecy of Micah concerning Bethlehem, and his eternal pre-existence.* Confounded by this information, which accorded so precisely with the testimony of the shepherds, Herod privately interrogated the Magi concerning the time when they had first observed the signal star, and learned to his increased dismay, that it was on the self-same night the angels had announced the advent of the Saviour to the rural company on the plains of Bethlehem. The crafty usurper now conceived the idea of destroying the hope of Israel in the bud ; but veiling his horrible design under the garb of religion, he hypocritically requested the Magi to visit him again in their way home, and communicate to him where they had found the young child, that he might go and worship him also.

Their last audience concluded, the Magi quitted Jerusalem, and followed the guiding-star till it stood motionless over the avenue behind the Khan in

* Mic. v. 2.

Bethlehem. Thither they bent their steps towards the sacred recess, and found Mary and the babe from heaven, in a lowly cavern. Discerning under the influences of the Holy Spirit the great mystery of Godliness, through the humble circumstances by which He was surrounded, they prostrated themselves in pious adoration, and presented incense to Him as God,—gold as an emblem of his human perfections, and myrrh as a symbol of propitiatory suffering for the salvation of sinners.

“ About the young Redeemer’s head,
What wonders and what glories meet !
An unknown star arose and led
The eastern sages to his feet.”

Having rendered Him their heartfelt praise and thanksgiving, they prepared to depart to their own country by the way of Jerusalem. But the Almighty Father, to whose omniscient mind Herod’s iniquitous intentions were exposed, commanded them in a vision, to return by another road, to avoid giving that crafty prince any clue to the Holy Child’s habitation. They returned, therefore, towards the south of the Dead Sea, and by a circuitous journey avoided being implicated in his wicked machinations. Still bent on the execution of his execrable scheme, Herod issued a barbarous decree, that all the infants under two years of age in Bethlehem and its environs

should be destroyed, hoping to involve Jesus in the indiscriminate massacre.

But God warned Joseph in a dream of his treacherous design, and directed him to remove immediately with Mary and her precious offspring, into Egypt. They departed therefore at daybreak, taking the then nearest road through Gaza and Pelusium towards Heliopolis and Memphis, and most probably sought refuge at or in the vicinity of Cairo. Near the village of Matarea, in a grove of citron and orange trees, there is still to be seen a remarkably aged sycamore, with hollow trunk and huge branches interlaced with the tendrils of sundry parasitic plants, under the shade of which they are said to have rested; and to have refreshed themselves at an adjacent well of pleasant water, called the Fountain of the Virgin. They are both still visited by travellers, as interesting reminiscences of the Saviour's condescension.

Herod did not long survive the innocent victims which he had prematurely hurried into eternity; for soon after their barbarous massacre, he was visited with the retributive justice which usually marks the end of a cruel tyrant. In his seclusion, Joseph did not hear that the Holy Child was delivered from that inexorable foe, till commanded by God in a vision to return with Him and his mother to Palestine, thus fulfilling Hosea's prophecy,—“When Israel was a

child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” *

Joseph gladly obeyed, but being apprehensive lest Archelaus should resemble his father and intercept his precious charge, he travelled with great haste through Judea, till they reached the valley which branches out of the great plain of Esdraelon. From thence they proceeded more leisurely on their journey, amid corn-fields interspersed with groups of olives and palms, and often * finding an agreeable shade under the outstretched horizontal branches of the massive carob tree, till they reached their home in the memorable town of Nazareth, so long hallowed with the Saviour's presence, and which has connected its name with many interesting associations. It is romantically seated on the brow of a rugged declivity above a depressed valley, with a steep cliff rising perpendicularly behind its white, flat-roofed buildings; and is encircled by a girdle of hills and rocky fragments, interspersed with verdure, trees, and flowers. In the valley below is a fountain, with a path of approach bordered by hedges of the prickly pear, named after the Virgin Mary, from a tradition that she was accustomed to resort thither with her water-jar, perhaps, sometimes accompanied by the youthful Jesus. From the grand and secluded character of the surrounding scenery, its undulating rocks and steep precipices, mingled with rich culti-

* Hos. xi. 1.

vation, it was a locality of much rural beauty, and admirably fitted to be the place where his humanity grew up and expanded to maturity, as “a *root* out of a dry ground,” and as the heavenly Nazarene, “purer than snow, whiter than milk, more ruddy than rubies, and his polishing of sapphires.”* Every rocky height above and every grassy vale below, upon which He trod, were consecrated by his footsteps, as He traversed them in sweet communion with God the Father, and while He meditated on the mighty work He had given Him to accomplish. His home must have been the hallowed abode of peace, love, and harmony, where He fulfilled every religious, social, and relative duty in admirable perfection; manifesting in all his words and actions a Divine innocence, holiness, and unction, and the most transcendent excellence of understanding, judgment, and penetration. For in his humanity were equally balanced and blended every moral grace and virtue, in exquisite harmony; enabling Him to fulfil the whole law of God, as the sinner’s Substitute, from infancy to manhood,—to “magnify and make it honourable.”†

“In every feature of his face,
Beauty her fairest charms displays;
Truth, wisdom, majesty, and grace,
Shine thence in sweetly-mingled rays.”

One circumstance only that transpired in his

* Lam. iv. 7. † Luke ii. 40.

childhood is recorded, which presents an interesting specimen of his pre-eminent wisdom. At twelve years of age, He went to Jerusalem with Joseph and Mary, to celebrate the passover. On reaching Bir, a day's journey from Jerusalem, in their way back to Nazareth, they discovered that He was absent from the caravan. In much tribulation they returned to the holy city, and passed three days in making fruitless inquiries in the streets and most frequented places. At length, to their great relief, they found Him in one of the schools within the precincts of the temple, engaged in deep discussion with the Rabbis, who were astonished at the sagacity of his reasoning, and his profound knowledge of the Scriptures. With a maternal expression of wounded affection, Mary exclaimed,—“Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” She had, alas! many bitter lessons to learn concerning the thorny path He was destined to tread in through this vale of tears; though with characteristic thoughtfulness she often reflected on his peculiar vocation, and viewed with admiration his transcendently-gifted mind, and the holiness and beauty of his actions. He replied to her remonstrance, by an expression of that zeal for his Father's glory, which He in due time displayed so magnanimously, and then quitted the learned assembly, and returned with her and Joseph to Nazareth. Their journey lay across the mountain ridge of Ephraim, rich in trees and shrubs,

diversified with rocky dales and desert heights; sometimes descending a steep declivity, then proceeding up hill, and again descending into the valley through verdant and flowery landscapes, till they reached Samaria, the crown and pride of Ephraim. From thence they traversed the beautiful plain of Esdraelon, in which the ancient river Kishon glitters like a stream of silver; and once more reached their hallowed abode, where Jesus continued to grow up in all the endearments of domestic life, in the progressive development of his mental powers and capacities, and of every spiritual grace and moral virtue.

“ In Him a loveliness complete,
Light and perfection shine;
And wisdom, grace, and glory meet,
A Saviour all Divine.”

CHAPTER II.

“This man born, and now up-grown
To show Him worthy of his birth Divine,
And high prediction, henceforth I expose to Satan.
. But first I mean
To exercise Him in the wilderness;
There He shall first lay down the rudiments
Of this great warfare, ere I send Him forth
To conquer sin and death, the two grand foes
By humiliation and long-sufferance.”

HAVING fulfilled every jot and tittle of God's holy law, from infancy to manhood, at the age of thirty, and in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, Jesus quitted the maternal roof, in order to commence the great work of redemption. Behold Him, then, who was the Creator of the earth on which He trod, going forth to perform his labour of love in the cause of humanity, his heart overflowing with philanthropy, and full of a holy zeal for the honour of the Divine attributes. As a preliminary to his sublime undertaking, He directed his steps to Bethabara,

on the banks of the Jordan, to receive into his manhood a plenary unction of the Holy Ghost, to anoint Him for his office. The country through which He passed, was surrounded by limestone rocks and hills, which his own hand had formed and fashioned. It was then covered, by human industry, with gardens and plantations, while the ground below teemed with spontaneous vegetation in rich exuberance, as He approached nearer to that depressed tract of pasturage land, through which the Jordan sweeps in picturesque beauty. This consecrated river derives its origin among the mountains of Lebanon, twenty miles above Cesarea Philippi; where the papyrus-reed grows in abundance. It has two sources, which, after uniting, flow in one continual stream through a narrow, rocky, well-wooded channel, in a full and noisy current to the sea of Tiberias, and from thence through Judea. Its banks of vivid green, interspersed with cliffs and slopes, present a sort of double channel, the lower filled at ordinary times, the upper only when its waters are swollen periodically; thus creating an oasis of wild and tangled vegetation, a maze of luxuriant brakes, intermixed with tall reeds, thickets of willows, vines and climbing plants, poplars and sycamores. In other places lofty timber overshadows the margin, interspersed with the blooming oleander, the zakkum, or Christ's thorn, and the white and pink-blossomed acacia. Jesus proceeded along its winding banks till He

reached Bethabara, where He presented himself to John for baptism, in conformity to the law of Moses, which ordained that the high-priest should wash before his consecration with the holy oil of anointing. The Baptist's retired life, had precluded him from any acquaintance with this Holy One of God, whom he was unconsciously heralding into the world. But he was so struck with the wisdom and benignity, grace and truth, innocence and love, which beamed from the countenance of Jesus, that he instinctively shrunk from the idea of baptizing one, who so evidently transcended the sons of men in the beauties of holiness. He was, however, constrained to acquiesce in the Saviour's will, and was at the same time favoured with indubitable evidences of his Divine nature. For, as He ascended the shelving banks of the river after his immersion, the clouds rushed apart, and displayed in the open sky the glorious Shechinah, which shone with a dazzling effulgence. At the same moment, the Holy Ghost, in his Godhead splendour, descended with the undulating motion of a gentle dove, upon his sacred head, and infused into his humanity an infinite plenitude; while God the Father bore simultaneous testimony to his perfections, as the accepted Surety of sinners,—a sublime revelation of the triune Jehovah, mutually interested in the great work of salvation!

On the following day, as John was preaching near

the wild and picturesque ford of Bethabara, opposite to Jericho, Jesus passed by, just, it would seem, as a flock of sheep were being driven across, in their way to Jerusalem, to furnish the daily sacrifice. Casting a glance of devout admiration at their heavenly Antitype, the Baptist directed the attention of Andrew, and John the Evangelist, to Him as their Saviour, exclaiming with joyful faith,—“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” This heartfelt testimony, accompanied with Divine power, reached their inmost souls; and in a spirit of inquiry, they instantly followed in his footsteps. Jesus, anticipating their desire to know more concerning Him, looked round upon them with complacency, responded to the question which the gracious expression of his countenance had encouraged them to ask, and invited them to accompany Him to his retreat. They gladly assented, received Him as the Messiah, and in due time became the companions of his ministry. In the fulness of his joy, Andrew communicated their blessed discovery to his brother Simon, and introduced him to Jesus, who called Philip of Bethsaida, the day after, to become his disciple. From a similar impulse of delight, Philip hastened to his friend Nathanael, exclaiming,—“We have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.” But Nathanael doubted that so pre-eminent a person as the Messiah could spring out of

that obscure village. Nevertheless, he consented to suspend his opinion till he had obtained a personal interview, and immediately accompanying Philip into his presence, was received as a spiritual son of Abraham, with marked approbation of his single-mindedness and candour. To convince him that He was indeed the omniscient Messiah, Jesus remarked that He had recently beheld him at his devotions, under an umbrageous fig-tree, where the light of the sun was so excluded by its broad leaves and overhanging branches, that its interior could be penetrated by the eye of God only. This circumstance at once removed all prejudice from Nathanael's mind, and in a rapture of joyful conviction, he answered,—“Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!” To this confession of faith, Jesus replied, by an assurance of a future more conspicuous manifestation of himself in his Divine nature. His disciples now beheld Him clothed in the garb of humanity; at his second advent they would see Him in the full lustre and majesty of his Godhead, and all the saints with Him, transformed into his similitude.*

As the great object of his incarnation was to destroy the works of the devil, it may be concluded that the hostility between Jesus and that malignant spirit was personal. The Father had decreed that their open conflict should begin in the dry and barren

• Matt. iii. 13—17; John i. 35—51.

wilderness of Quarantina, a wild tract of country between Jerusalem and Jericho, overspread with high rocky mountains, torn and disordered as if by some great convulsion of nature. Thither Jesus therefore went full of the Holy Ghost, immediately after his baptism, to encounter this terrible antagonist. And as Moses had fasted forty days and forty nights, when the law was given on Mount Sinai, and Elijah at its restitution, so, as their Antitype, He refrained from food during the same length of time, and in a state of physical weakness submitted his pure and innocent humanity to be tried and tempted, as the Second Adam—the Lord from heaven. Overcome with weakness and lassitude, and a prey to the severest pangs of thirst and hunger, He reclined his exhausted frame against a rock, and awaited the approach of the enemy, who speedily came to Him, full of hope that in such a state of prostration he should gain the advantage. Casting his eyes sarcastically upon the stony fragments, which lay scattered about the ground, he insidiously denied that Jesus could be the Son of God, reduced to such extremity, and craftily urged him to prove his Divine origin, by transmuting the stones into bread, to satisfy the cravings of nature. Jesus indignantly repulsed him by a quotation from the Holy Scriptures. Undaunted by this first defeat, he again raised Him up and transported Him through

“The air sublime
Over the wilderness, and o’er the plain,
Till underneath them fair Jerusalem,
The holy city, lifted high her towers;
And higher yet the glorious temple reared
Her pile, far off appearing like a mount
Of alabaster—tipt with golden spire,”

and set Him on its highest pinnacle. There he once more challenged Him to prove his Godhead, by a miraculous descent from that lofty eminence, but was again conquered by the sword of the Spirit. Still unabashed and persevering, the tempter conveyed Him back to the desert, and placing Him on the summit of a steep, craggy, and almost inaccessible mountain, commanding a view of half Palestine, displayed before his imagination “the kingdoms of the world in all their glory,” offering to yield them up without a struggle, if He would only deign to render him homage for the concession. But vain ambition had no place in the holy mind of Jesus; and besides, He knew that his Father had appointed Him a universal empire, which would break all earthly dominions into atoms, establish itself upon their ruins, and endure gloriously for ever. Therefore, once more repelling the enemy, with the weapon of holy writ, He constrained him to quit the field in a state of inconceivable disappointment and mortification—a crest-fallen and vanquished foe, mortally wounded, and doomed to everlasting destruction.

These mysterious temptations being thus brought to a triumphant conclusion, a band of angels, which had been watching the combat with intense interest from above the skies, hastened down and administered to Christ's bodily necessities, exulting in his victory with songs of praise and gratulation. His sinking strength being recruited by the food which they had brought, He returned to Nazareth, there to commence his ministry, rejoicing as a strong man who had gained a conqueror's diadem, all nature seeming to smile upon Him as its beneficent Creator, while He trod the earth which owed all its beauty to his Divine power.*

On the Sabbath after his arrival, He began his mission as the great Teacher of Israel, in the synagogue which He had been accustomed to frequent in the days of his youthful probation. By a striking coincidence, the book of Isaiah was presented to Him to read, and He opened it at the sixty-first chapter, which describes that plenary unction of the Holy Ghost, He had so recently received on the banks of the river Jordan. With great solemnity, and in an audible tone, He applied the description given of the Messiah, by that prophet, to Himself, and when He afterwards closed the volume, and sat down, "all eyes were fastened on Him" in amazement, at the unexpected disclosure. The congregation was overawed by the mild majesty and heavenly meekness

* Matt. iv. 1—11.

which beamed from his countenance; and for an instant a solemn persuasion seemed to pervade every mind, of the truth and justice of the application; but the impression was transient,—being speedily followed by the recollection of the apparent mediocrity of his extraction, which at once destroyed their convictions. Jesus knew their thoughts, and to bring them openly to the test, struck at the root of one of their strongest prejudices, by an allusion to God's love for the Gentiles. This, as He expected, brought the altered tone of their sentiments to light, and raised an angry tumult. Such was their rage, that some of the more violent seized hold of Him, and dragged his sacred person to the steep cliff behind the town, with a design to cast Him headlong down the precipice. This cruel purpose He calmly eluded, by miraculously escaping from their grasp, and retiring to Capernaum, which was henceforth much honoured by his presence, and therefore called his own city.* †

Jesus now began to collect his apostles, and again meeting with Simon, Andrew, and John on the

* Josephus describes the district in which Capernaum stood, as “possessing peculiar beauty and fertility; with a climate so favourable, that nut-trees, bearing in other places only during winter, palms, which are nourished with heat, and figs and olives, which require more temperate atmosphere, might be seen ripe and flourishing together.

† Luke iv. 14—32.

sea-shore, engaged in their occupation of fishermen, He commanded them to abandon their trade, and join Him in the mighty work of disseminating his Gospel. James, who happened to be with them, He also called to be one of their number, and Philip of Bethsaida was united to them shortly after. Attended by these five disciples, Jesus condescended to honour a nuptial feast at Cana with his presence; no solitary instance of his gracious conformity to the innocent social customs of human life, and of his sympathy in its enjoyments, as well as in its sorrows. Traversing a fertile valley, surrounded by hills luxuriantly covered with the pomegranate and terebinth, the palm and the olive, they ascended the declivity upon which Cana is gracefully seated above the hollow of a fruitful plain, and surrounded by a lovely prospect. On entering the bridegroom's house, Jesus, with his accustomed affability, took his place among the guests, and shed over them a halo of illumination and sanctity. As Mary was one of the party, it may be inferred that the newly-married couple were her relations, especially as she displayed much concern when informed that the wine was all consumed, before the repast was over. She had, no doubt, witnessed instances of her Son's power in private, and therefore hoped He would supply the deficiency, which she implied in her manner of communicating the untoward circumstance. To impress her the importance of ceasing to exercise maternal

influence now that He had commenced his ministry, and the impropriety of her interference, He replied, by a gentle yet respectful repulse, adding that the proper hour was not yet come for the exercise of his miraculous operations. Immediately sensible of her mistake, she acquiesced in the reasonableness of his admonition; but persuaded of his kind intention, directed the servants to obey any orders they might receive from Him. At his command, therefore, they began to fill six empty stone jars with water from the copious spring of Cana, and when they were replenished, He, by his Almighty fiat, transmuted the transparent colourless liquid into the juice of the grape, which He rendered more perfect and delicious wine, than could possibly be made by any human process. Ignorant of the miracle which had been so unostentatiously wrought, the president of the feast attested its superior excellence and exquisite flavour, by an expression of amazement, that it had not been introduced at the beginning of the repast, according to the usual custom on similar occasions.*

Soon after his return to Capernaum, while teaching in the synagogue, He again manifested his omnipotence, by commanding a devil to depart from a poor man. Compelled to yield to his authority, and constrained to recognise his Divine origin, the unclean spirit cried out through the organs of speech belonging to its victim,—“I know thee who

* Matt. iv. 18—22; John ii. 1—11.

thou art, the Holy One of God ; ” and while He was rebuking it, with calm dignity and heavenly majesty, it threw the demoniac violently down on the ground, and left him, not daring to proceed to any further injury. The spectators were greatly amazed, and “ from this time, his fame began to spread in every place round about the country.”*

After the service was over, Jesus proceeded to Peter’s house, whose mother-in-law was suffering from a violent attack of fever. With a single touch He banished her disorder, and she instantly arose from her couch in perfect health, and ministered to Him and to his disciples. On the same evening, at sunset, many were brought to Him with divers maladies, and in his unflinching pity He laid his hands on every one and healed them. For, as by imputation He endured the weight of our sins in his own body on the tree, so by sympathy “ He bare our sicknesses,” in the pain with which He witnessed every species of human suffering.†

At the ensuing passover, Jesus asserted his heavenly power and authority, by declaring himself to be the Lord of the temple, who, as Malachi predicted, would suddenly appear in that sacred edifice, as the believer’s delight and the Messenger of the covenant ! In the court of the Gentiles, there had been gradually established that branch of trade, which consisted in supplying foreigners with the

* Mark i. 23—28. † Luke iv. 38—40 ; Matt. viii. 17.

customary sacrifices, though it might have been as easily and more appropriately carried on, within the second wall in the north quarter of the city, which was the chief seat of business.* To denote his disapprobation of this abuse in a significant manner, Jesus made a scourge of small cords, caused the sheep and oxen to rush instinctively out, and expelled the cattle-dealers and money-changers, with such an impression of Divine authority, and holiness of personal character, as overawed and subdued them into passive obedience, if it did not send them away conscience-smitten, for having desecrated a place set apart for the purposes of Divine worship. He then overthrew the tables on which were deposited the foreign money and Jewish coin, and ordered the dove-cages to be taken away. After an awful pause, the worldly-minded and prejudiced Jews demanded a further sign that He was the Messiah, more adapted to their preconceived notions. But Jesus, knowing their hypocrisy, referred them to the evidences which would be one day afforded by the resurrection of his body, which the temple typified. So little, however, did they comprehend his symbo-

* The second wall commenced at the gate Gennath, near the tower of Hippicas, and encompassed the northern quarter as far as Fort Antonia, at the north-west angle of the temple court, communicating with the sacred structure by a flight of steps and causeways.

lical language, that they made it a charge against Him, when He was afterwards arraigned before Pilate as an insurgent and blasphemmer.*

It was at this period, that the mind of Nicodemus, a noble senator, became deeply impressed with the holiness of Jesus, and the renown of his mighty miracles; but he stood in too much awe of the priesthood, to make any open profession of discipleship. Still, to soothe his convictions, and to obtain religious instruction, he visited Him secretly in the night, and avowed his belief in Him as a Divinely commissioned Teacher. Jesus knowing his sincerity, replied, by inculcating on him the necessity of a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness, before he could comprehend spiritual things, and be qualified for the glories of eternity. But, versed as Nicodemus was in Hebrew literature, he neither understood nor felt the importance of this vital change, which is incomprehensible to the unrenewed mind. To illustrate what He meant to convey by his allusion to the agency of the Holy Ghost, Jesus compared it to the operation of the winds, which no human being can control, or explain how they engender storms, or where they retire to when the blast is over.—So, like the free circulation of the air, God displays his sovereignty by transforming the soul, when, where, and how He pleaseth,—his renovating

* John ii. 13—22.

influences as much transcending water-baptism as the substance excels the shadow.

“Not all the outward forms on earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
Can raise a soul to heaven.

“The sovereign will of God alone,
Creates us heirs of grace ;
Born in the image of his Son,
A new peculiar race.”

Jesus further expatiated to Nicodemus on his own Divine nature, which implied infinite omnipresence ; declaring that He was God in heaven from everlasting, although dwelling for a season in a fleshly tabernacle. In allusion to his atonement, He compared himself when suspended on the cross (so that all who look upon Him with the eye of faith, may live for ever in glory), to the brazen serpent, which, when lifted up by Moses before the dying Israelite, restored him to life immediately.*

* John iii. 1—17.

CHAPTER III.

**"The woman who for water came,—
What great events on small depend!
Then learn'd the glory of his name,
The Well of Life, the sinner's Friend."**

**"His words her prejudice removed,
Her sin she felt, relief she found;
She saw and heard, believed and loved,
And ran to tell her neighbours round."**

**"O come, this wondrous man behold,
The promised Saviour! this is He
Whom ancient prophecies foretold,
Born from our guilt to set us free."**

IN his return to Galilee, after the passover, Jesus "must needs go through Samaria;" but even had that country not stood in his path, He would probably have visited it, in following out his designs of love and mercy. On reaching the smiling valley of Sychar, He passed on through groves of shady trees, encircled with the graceful branches of the vine, without stopping to take rest and refreshment, till

He reached Jacob's well, near the gates of Sychar. There He seated himself beneath the shelter of a rock, to repose his fatigued humanity, which, though holy as God is holy, was liable to every innocent infirmity of the flesh.

“ Jesus, to what didst thou submit,
To save thy dear bought flock from hell!
Like a poor traveller see Him sit,
Athirst and weary by the well.”

Above this interesting spot stood Sychar, stretching up a sloping ground, adorned with splendid edifices and colonnades by the magnificence of Herod, embosomed in palm-trees, and overhung with the fine faced, orange coloured, twin heights of Gerizim and Ebal;—two bold rocks fissured with dark clefts, and fringed with brushwood; presenting with the adjacent scenery a picturesque landscape,—the beauty and interest of which were transcendantly heightened by the presence of the life-giving Saviour. A woman meanwhile approaches the well, to fill her pitcher for domestic purposes; and Jesus introduces himself, by asking for some water to quench his thirst after his journey. Perceiving from his costume and peculiar cast of features that He was a Jew, she expressed amazement at his request. For from the inveterate hatred which subsisted between the two nations, she imagined He would have shrunk from a vessel touched by the hand of a Samaritan, as from the greatest defilement. He answered her remarks, by

directing her thoughts to the living streams of salvation, which He could bestow; and then, with more than mortal knowledge, unveiled the leading transactions of her private history. Convinced that one who could detect the hidden sins of the heart, must be at least a prophet, and conscience-smitten, she endeavoured to change the subject, by referring to Him a question then much controverted,—the comparative merit of the worship offered in Samaria, and that of Jerusalem. For when driven from the holy city by Nehemiah, Manasseh had erected a splendid temple upon Mount Gerizim, in imitation of the sacred edifice restored by Ezra, which was held in great veneration by the Samaritans. Jesus replied, by an allusion to the destruction of the Jewish economy. “The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father,” for only a spiritual worship will be acceptable throughout the world, under the new Gospel dispensation. She expressed her belief, that the Messiah would soon come, and instruct them more perfectly concerning the way of salvation; when, to her amazement, He revealed himself to her as that very desire of all nations,—“I that speak unto thee am He.” Struck with the simplicity and tenderness of his manner, and deeply moved by his condescending goodness and mercy, to so great a sinner as she herself to be, she threw down her water-jar in an outburst of joy, and hastened back into the town to

communicate her glorious discovery. The disciples were at this moment returning from thence, with provisions which they had purchased; and as they approached the well, were surprised to see their Lord conversing with a Samaritan. They presumed not, however, to express their sentiments, knowing He would listen to their objections with disapprobation. They, therefore, contented themselves with imploring Him to partake of the food which they had brought; but absorbed in his mission of love, to the forgetfulness of his own physical necessities, He replied,—“My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work.”

Attracted by the woman's testimony concerning Jesus, many went back with her to the well, and when they saw Him, were convinced from his heavenly countenance and Divine language, that He was the Messiah; and anxious to be more perfectly instructed in his gracious doctrines, besought Him to tarry awhile in Sychar. He complied with his usual condescension and lovingkindness,—went into the city—“abode there two days,” and converted many by the power of his word, who testified that He was “indeed Christ the Saviour.”*

When He had completed his labour of love at Sychar, Jesus revisited Cana, where a nobleman from Capernaum came to Him in deep affliction, with some degree of confidence, that He could restore his

* John iv. 1—42.

beloved son to health, although he was given over by the physicians. He had not, however, any conception of his true nature, which as God rendered Him omnipotent, to command away disease at any distance; but considering contact essential to the performance of the miracle, implored Him speedily to visit his dying child and prevent his dissolution. Jesus mildly reproved his imperfect faith, while graciously and tenderly responding to his petition, He said,—“Go thy way, thy son liveth.” A Divine energy accompanying his words, reached the dying child, raised him up in health and vigour; and simultaneously pierced the father’s heart with a conviction, that his supplication was complied with. He therefore set out early on the following morning for Capernaum, full of hope, and was met on the road by his servants, with the joyful tidings of his son’s recovery. Its exact correspondence with the hour when Jesus had said, “Thy son liveth,” so incontestably proved Him to be the Son of God, that it was the means of, converting not only the nobleman himself, but his whole household to Christianity.*

The fame of Jesus was now extended far and wide throughout Palestine, and multitudes thronged to Him out of the northern districts from Decapolis,

¹ Judea, to be healed of their diseases, and included in his Gospel. Near Mount Tabor, stands

* John iv. 46, &c.

a fertile mountain crowned with two verdant and flowery eminences, from whence may be seen a magnificent prospect,—plain rises above plain in gradual succession, while the lower territory is overspread with the blue waters of the Sea of Tiberias, which was at that time bordered with towns and villages, and studded with fishing-boats and Roman vessels. This mountain Jesus ascended, to expound the moral law, followed by the multitude. Seating himself upon one of its verdant ridges, with the disciples at his feet, and the people surrounding Him, with that heavenly wisdom and authority essentially his own, He pronounced everlasting blessings on the merciful and meek—the pure in heart, the penitent, and the peace-makers—on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and who are persecuted for the sake of the Gospel.

He then explained the law in its spiritual and refined sense, and showed that it comprehended the most secret evil thoughts and desires, and every unsanctified feeling,—unfolding to the view of his hearers a degree of holiness which they could only attain to, by faith in Him, as the Lord their Righteousness, who, as their substitute, had perfectly fulfilled all its requirements.

Addressing himself more especially to the apostles, He reminded them of their high and responsible calling, under the expressive similitudes of light and salt : since by disseminating his Gospel they w^r

illuminate the spiritual darkness of a world lying in wickedness, and to preserve it from that total corruption towards which it was fast hastening. He then admonished them all to avoid ostentation in their works of charity, and to bestow their alms purely out of love to God and their fellow-creatures, without regard to human approbation. He recommended them to abstain from will worship and an outward show of humility, and to cultivate and cherish secret communion with God the Father. To aid their devotion, He gave them an unparalleled model prayer, containing an epitome of the prevailing desires of the sincere Christian, and pronounced the love of the world to be incompatible with obedience to his Gospel.

In the most simple and beautiful language, He then encouraged them to set aside all undue anxiety concerning the things of time and sense,—trusting to the care of that bountiful Providence, which feeds the birds of the air by a provision expressly made for them at the creation; when God so constituted the wild lilies of the field, as to exempt them from the necessity of human culture, and arrayed them so splendidly, that they transcend in delicate beauty all the glory of Solomon in his royal apparel.

He concluded his sermon, with an awful denunciation on the teachers of error, and on false professors of religion, by a comparison of the final happy lot of the renewed believer, with the dreadful fate of

those who, by rejecting the counsel of God against their own souls, forfeit the joys of eternity. The audience departed full of astonishment "at his doctrine, for He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes," whom He infinitely surpassed, in the purity and sublimity of his instructions.*

On his way back to Capernaum, Jesus was met by a leper, who prostrated himself with earnest entreaties, that He would cure him by a miracle. This dreadful malady being typical of the far worse disease of sin, with which all the sons of Adam are deeply tainted, was considered as a special mark of the Divine anger, and as curable by God only.

" Oft as the leper's case I read,
My own describ'd I feel,
Sin is a leprosy indeed,
Which none but Christ can heal."

This tender-hearted Saviour instantly stretched forth his hand towards the supplicant, restored him to health by a touch, and dismissed him with an injunction not to publish the miracle, but to go straight to the priest to be examined, and to render the accustomed offering of two sparrows with cedar-wood, scarlet, and hyssop. Upon this occasion, one bird was killed in an earthen vessel over running water, to prefigure the atonement; and the other was dipped alive in its blood, sprinkled with it seven times, and then let loose in the open air, to signify

* Matt. v., &c., &c.

the believer's purification, and emancipation from the dangers of eternal destruction. The poor man, however, could not restrain the grateful expression of his joy, and in his way to and from the synagogue so "blazed abroad the matter," that Jesus, as he had apprehended, "could no more openly enter into the city." He, therefore, returned, as privately as possible, to his house in Capernaum, but still, as usual, not without a train of followers.*

On his way thither, a petition was presented to Him, by some Jewish elders, in favour of a paralytic servant belonging to a centurion of the Roman army. To enforce their request, they represented his master as a proselyte of the gate, who, having renounced heathenism, and embraced the worship of the true God, had erected a synagogue in Galilee, where he could enjoy the privilege of Divine ordinances. Jesus complied by immediately directing his steps towards the centurion's abode, but before He had proceeded far, was overtaken by messengers from that enlightened Gentile, expressing his unworthiness to receive so distinguished a person under his roof, thus recognising Him as the omnipotent Messiah. With a firm belief in his absolute power over the whole creation, he insinuated that a word only from Him, would command away his domestic's malady, as easily as he could himself send the soldiers belonging to his in and out at pleasure. Jesus applauded

* Mark i. 40—45.

his faith and humility, healed the paralytic "in the self-same hour," and proceeded homewards immediately.*

On the following day He crossed the river Kishon, and the plain of Esdraelon, on which stands with a peculiar aspect of solitude the round, conical Mount Tabor, covered to the summit with trees and rich verdure. As usual, He was accompanied by the multitude, and as they advanced towards Nain, below the hill of Hermon, a funeral issued slowly through the gate, bearing to the cemetery the body of a young man, cut off in the flower of his age, the last hope and consolation of his widowed mother. She was following him to the grave, mourning and bewailing with heart-felt grief his premature death, which had rent the last dear tie of a once happy home entirely asunder. The Saviour's exquisite sensibilities were roused at the sight of her misery; and casting a glance of commiseration upon her tear-stained countenance, He resolved to wipe away from it every trace of sorrow. To prepare her mind therefore for the miracle He was about to work, to effect this gracious purpose, He addressed her in a tone of peculiar tenderness and sympathy, saying, "Weep not," implying his intention to dry up her tears instantly. And then, extending his hand towards the bier, He touched it, as a signal to the bearers to "stand still." Their steps were arrested.—

* Luke vii. 1—10.

He uttered the omnipotent fiat,—“Young man, I say unto thee arise,” and in a moment the soul returned to its forsaken tabernacle, and reanimated it with life and vigour. “And he that was dead sat up,” looked with amazement on the scene before him, and began to express the sentiments awakened in his mind, rejoicing for his mother’s sake to be restored once more to her maternal embrace; and no doubt they both received Jesus as their Saviour, and worshipped his holy name with praise and thanksgiving.

“Change then, O sad one, grief to exultation;
Worship and fall before Messiah’s knee.
Strong was his arm the bringer of salvation;
Strong was the Word of God to succour thee.”

The people who witnessed the miracle also “glorified God, saying, that a great prophet had visited them.” “And the rumour of Him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about.”*

To seclude himself from the notoriety occasioned by the resurrection of the widow’s son, Jesus retired the next morning, into a desert on the sea coast; but finding it impossible to remain there for the present, without attracting too large a multitude, He considered it expedient to cross over to the opposite shore. Wearied with his unremitting exertions in the cause of truth and humanity, He laid his sacred pillow in the stern immediately on entering

* Luke vii. 11—17.

the ship, and fell into a sweet and gentle slumber. But, before the vessel had gained much distance from the coast, there arose one of those tempestuous hurricanes, which sometimes rush suddenly down the mountain gorges, and wave after wave rolled over Him, without disturbing the rest of the heavenly sleeper, till terrified by the storm which beat furiously against the vessel, the disciples awoke Him, crying out in a loud and imploring tone,—“Lord, save us, we perish.” The mournful appeal reaching his heart, He instantly arose to relieve their fears, smoothed by a word the rough billows, and silenced the boisterous winds into stillness; tenderly rebuking their want of faith in his presence as a sufficient security from danger. Thus He manifested himself to be that Divine Saviour, so beautifully described by the Psalmist,—“Thou rulest the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.” “They mount up to heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble.” “He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven.” Assisted by a favourable breeze, they soon reached the opposite shore, and landed at Gadara, which was then a place of importance, and still retains marks of its ancient grandeur.

On reaching the gigantic tombs in the environs

of Gadara, a demoniac, who had perceived Jesus "afar off," advancing from the sea coast, rushed forward, and fell at his feet, subdued into a belief that He was the Messiah, and able to deliver him from his calamity. So great was his fierceness, it had been impossible hitherto to restrain him from mischief. In vain had he been bound with chains and fetters; the one he plucked asunder, and the other he broke in pieces; and wandered day and night among the tombs, avoiding and avoided by his fellow-creatures. The compassionate heart of Jesus was touched with pity at the sight of the man's misery, and in a tone of irresistible authority, He commanded the legion of devils which possessed him, to relinquish their victim. Constrained to obey, and to recognise Him as the Son of God, they entreated permission to enter a herd of swine, which was feeding near the adjacent mountains, and their request being acceded to, they instantly transferred themselves into those animals, which, with one simultaneous impulse, ran rapidly down a steep precipice into the sea, and were all drowned. The herdsmen fled in consternation, and reported the catastrophe to their masters, who hastened to the spot, deeply concerned for their loss, but justly punished (if they were Jews), for carrying on a prohibited traffic. Great was their amazement, on 'ding the demoniac meekly "sitting at the feet s, in his right mind and clothed;" but alive

only to the destruction of their property, they unanimously implored Him "to depart out of their coasts," lest He should visit them with some other judgment. The man, on the contrary, who had been emancipated from so many enemies, clung to Him with the confidence of faith working by love, and entreated permission to remain with Him constantly. But he was graciously answered by Jesus,—“Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” He obeyed, however, reluctantly, and “began to publish” the miracle in Decapolis, where his former lamentable condition was well known; “and all men did marvel,”* and many were doubtless converted through his instrumentality.

On returning to his own city, Jesus was met by crowds of people from all parts of Syria, who brought to Him to be healed, “all that were afflicted with divers diseases and torments.” And while He was preaching on the sea shore, they pressed upon Him in so great a number, and with such eagerness, that He considered it expedient to enter Peter’s fishing boat, which was moored on the strand, requesting him to “thrust out a little from the land.” When his sermon was concluded, He desired that apostle to launch out to sea, and to let down his net into the deep. “Master,” he replied, “we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing, never-

* Mark v. 1—20.

theless, because thou commandest, I will obey." He did so instantly, and such a multitude of fishes rushed into the net, that it began to break, and he was constrained to make a signal to his partners, who were in another ship, to hasten to his assistance, with whose aid both vessels were so abundantly filled, as nearly to sink under the weight of their cargo. Peter, with a ready conception of Christ's Godhead, was instantly seized with such an overpowering consciousness of his own unworthiness to come in contact with One so holy and Divine, that he fell down at his feet, exclaiming,—“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Jesus graciously soothed his conscience, by an assurance that the miracle was an earnest of similar success in preaching the Gospel, in which James and John would participate. They rejoiced in their appointment to so sacred a mission, and willing to engage in any service for One who had inspired them with a high degree of love and reverence, “when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed Jesus.”*

* Luke v. 1—11, 17.

CHAPTER IV.

“ O thou meek and lowly Saviour,
How determined is thy love ;
Not their rude unkind behaviour,
Could thy gracious purpose move.
Soon as He the room had entered,
Spoke, and took her by the hand,
Death at once his prey surrendered,
And she lived at his command.”

WHILE Jesus was on one occasion preaching in the middle court of a house in Capernaum, “ the doctors of the law sitting by, who were come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem ” to hear Him, a paralytic man, full of faith in his mighty power, was carried to Him, on a portable couch, with a strong determination on the part of his bearers to force their way through every obstacle. Having pushed through the crowd, to the private stair-case near the porch, they drew him up the steps to the flat roof, by means of a rope fastened to the four corners of the mattress ;

unhooked the braces of the canopy, stretched over the court to protect the head of Jesus and his audience from the scorching rays of the sun, folded it back, and lowered the paralytic, in his reclining posture, along the painted earthenware tiles which decked the wall of the interior, and deposited him at the feet of the Saviour. Approbation of the deed was implied in the endearing epithet of "Son," by which Jesus accosted him, adding the encouraging assurance, that his sins were pardoned, as a prelude to the healing of his disorder. Ignorant that, as one with the Father, He possessed the power to absolve from sin, as well as to bestow redemption, the scribes took offence at this assumption of a privilege which belonged to God only. Jesus knew the feeling of their hearts, and to convince them of his power, both to pardon and to heal, turned his eyes graciously on the patient, and commanded him to "Arise and walk," in a tone of irresistible authority. Impelled by the Divine energy which accompanied these words, he started up, and finding himself suddenly restored to the perfect use of his limbs, deliberately folded up his mattress, and departed with it through the midst of the assembly which had gathered round Jesus, praising and glorifying Him for his goodness.*

Soon after this miracle, Jesus passed by the Roman custom house, where duties were levied for

* Matt. ix. 1—8.

the Emperor, on certain commodities transported across the lake from an opposite landing-place. Perceiving Matthew, one of the officers appointed to collect the tribute, engaged in his occupation, He called him to renounce it, and become one of his apostles. Matthew cheerfully obeyed the mandate, gave up his place, and desirous of introducing his friends to so gracious a Saviour, invited them to a feast which he had made for the occasion. Among the guests were many publicans and sinners, attracted thither by the reputation of Jesus, and a desire to behold Him, and to hear his Gospel. The Pharisees complained to Him of this indiscriminate admission of a class of persons held in general disrepute, and whose presence they considered an absolute defilement. But He confuted their illiberal prejudices in the most admirable manner, with an implied censure of their own spiritual pride and self-righteousness. Some proselytes of John the Baptist who were among the company, gave a striking instance of that propensity which exists in the human heart to substitute bodily service in the place of real godliness, by inquiring, why He permitted his disciples to neglect the duty of fasting? He replied, that, as "the children of the bridechamber," fasting would be unseasonable, while He, the "Bridegroom," remained among them.

As Jesus quitted Matthew's house, He continued his instructions, by describing in two beautiful

similitudes, the powerlessness of the outward forms of religion, to change man's fallen nature,—the uselessness of patching up the best human actions with the new robe of salvation, since they are but as polluted garments in the sight of God the Father,—and the impossibility of receiving the new wine of the kingdom of grace, into the heart of the unregenerate. While thus engaged, Jairus, an eminent ruler of the synagogue, rushed towards Him, in all the anguish of a fond parent in immediate danger of losing his child, and falling prostrate at his feet, worshipped Him, with earnest entreaties that He would restore her, although as he had left her at the point of death, her life was probably by this time extinguished. In compliance with this touching appeal, Jesus immediately proceeded towards his house, followed by the multitude. Among them was a woman, who had been for twelve years afflicted with an incurable malady; greatly impoverished by the expenses it had entailed on her, while she "suffered" in vain "many things" of various physicians. Impelled by a high degree of faith, she forced her way through the crowd and touched the hem of his garment, with devout confidence in his transcendent power, and was instantly "healed of her plague." Conscious that "virtue had flowed out of Him," and of the occasion which had elicited it, Jesus "turned round," and, fixing upon her a kind, approving glance, id, "Who touched my clothes?" This appeared a

strange inquiry to the disciples, considering that contact in such circumstances was unavoidable; but the woman, taking courage from the gracious expression of his countenance, fell at his feet, and with much emotion, confessed what she had done, and its instantaneous effect in removing her malady. He affectionately reassured her with his own sweet peace, commended her faith, and sent her away, under a deep sense of his loving-kindness, and full of joy and happiness.

Just as this interesting affair was concluded, a messenger reached Jairus from his afflicted wife; who, ignorant of Christ's power to restore life which had become extinct, requested him, as their child was dead, not to "trouble the Master." But Jesus, with the most amiable sympathy in his grief at the sad tidings thus conveyed, still accompanied him to his home, which He found surrounded by minstrels playing doleful strains of music, and mourners weeping and wailing. He commanded them to cease their lamentations, and to stand aside while He approached the maiden's chamber, adding, she "is not dead but sleepeth." Incapable of comprehending death as a slumber, a transition state of rest for the soul, and of repose for the body, till at the sound of the archangel's trumpet the latter shall be changed into a spiritual structure, and both reunited in glory,—they laughed Him to scorn. Nevertheless, overawed by the holiness of his demeanour, they felt constrained to retire, while, attended by James and

Peter, He entered the room where the child lay, pale and inanimate as an alabaster statue. Taking her by the hand, He said in a tone of Divine authority,—“Maid, arise!” and instantly her separated spirit reanimated its animal frame, and she started up in the full bloom of youth, to the unspeakable amazement of her delighted parents. To sustain the life so wonderfully restored, Jesus then directed meat “to be set before her,” charging them, at the same time, not to publish the miracle. But concealment was impossible, “the fame thereof went abroad into all that land.”*

His mighty works, so infinitely transcending the miracles of Moses and Elijah, incontestibly proved Jesus to be the Son of God; and they who “were ordained unto eternal life,” gladly received Him as their Lord and Saviour, while the Pharisees dared to attribute them to the influence of Satan. But disregarding their hostility, He continued to itinerate, healing diseases, and preaching in the towns and villages,—on the plains and in the valleys,—in the highways and by the sea-shore,—with unwearied love and benevolence; while his heart was frequently touched with pity for the spiritual destitution of the people in a land of false teachers, where they were scattered about, like sheep without a shepherd, to lead them into the green pastures of salvation.

* Matt. ix. 1—26.

Crossing a field, one Sabbath morning, in his way to the synagogue, his disciples who were suffering from hunger, plucked a few ears of corn which were just ripe for the sickle. Some Pharisees were passing by at the time, and observing the action, endeavoured to stigmatize Jesus, for permitting what they considered to be a breach of the law of Moses. He rebuked their hypocrisy, by vindicating the deed as innocent in a case of such urgent necessity, and reminded them how David, in a similar emergency, had avoided perishing for want of food, by eating the shewbread which was consecrated to the exclusive use of the priesthood; and also of the expediency of performing certain offices in the temple on the Sabbath. In reference to his own Deity, He also argued that as He Himself originally ordained the Sabbath, He was not likely to sanction any breach of its holiness. On entering the synagogue, He afforded them a demonstration of his power, by restoring a man's withered hand, previously making the searching inquiry,—“Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?” The Pharisees could not reply without incurring the risk of self-condemnation; and conjecturing from the compassionate expression of his countenance that a miracle would be wrought, they secretly resolved to accuse Him of a breach of the law before the Sanhedrim. Knowing their malicious intention, and “grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He looked round about on them with anger,” while the

man, at his command, stretched forth his hand, and it was "restored whole as the other." This work of mercy, as Jesus expected, aggravated their rage, and, notwithstanding the reverence they had professed for this consecrated day, they scrupled not before its close to consult with the Herodians, "how they might destroy Him." To elude their wicked design, Jesus quietly retired to another neighbourhood, presenting a striking contrast to their fury, according to Isaiah's beautiful picture of his mild and heavenly character.

But the Pharisees still pursued Him with unrelenting hostility. Wherever He went, they were sure to mingle in the crowd, and endeavour to destroy his popularity; and shortly after, perceiving Him eject a devil from a blind and dumb man, whose sight and speech He restored, they attributed the miracle to the power of Satan. This profane accusation He pronounced to be the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, which precluded his sanctifying operations on the souls that were guilty of it, left them unrenewed in heart, and therefore incapable of salvation. Some of them, however, were impressed in a degree, by the evidences of his Messiahship, but requested a special sign of their own dictating. To which He replied, only by a reference to his approaching triumph over death, as typified by Jonah's deliverance from the whale's belly, after lying three days therein, under the waves of the

ocean. Meanwhile, Mary, accompanied by the sons of Joseph, knowing how greatly his life was endangered by the jealousy of the priesthood, sent a message, imploring Him to "come out and speak with them." Their request was echoed through the crowd, till it reached his ears, but intent on persevering in his labour of love, He returned an answer which implied his disregard of their apprehensions, and disavowed any right on their part to interpose in his ministry. "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? whosoever doeth the will of God, is" henceforth "my brother, my sister and mother."* In the cool of the evening, He adjourned to the seaside, and continued his instructions in various parables, some of which He explained privately to the apostles, as relating to his eternal kingdom.

"From heaven He came, of heaven He spoke,
To heaven He led his followers' way;
Dark clouds of gloomy night He broke,
Unveiling an immortal day."

Soon after, Jesus returned once more to Nazareth, and resumed his teaching with so much heavenly unction, that the Nazarenes in amazement, inquired, whence He could have derived his extraordinary wisdom? Ignorant of his true origin, they knew only that He had grown up among them from early childhood, as the reputed son of Joseph the carpenter; their pride was much wounded by his

* Matt. xii. 46—50.

assuming to be their Teacher, and they disclaimed his title to be the Messiah. He, therefore, "did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."*

It was about this period, that He ordained the apostles to go forth and proclaim his Gospel in certain parts of the country. After passing the previous night in communion with God the Father, on the summit of a mountain, He instructed them in the things pertaining to his kingdom, endued them with the power of confirming the truth of their doctrine by miracles, and sent them forth two and two, with directions to provide for themselves only a staff and sandals, trusting entirely to that kind Providence, which daily fed the birds of the air, and arrayed the flowers of the field in inimitable beauty. On descending with them to the plain, He found a vast assemblage of people from Judæa, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon, waiting "to hear Him, and to be cured of their diseases." But, before He could minister to their necessities, He concluded his discourse to the apostles, and dismissed them with his benediction, which He extended to all who, for his sake, should entertain them with courtesy and hospitality.† With the exception of Judas Iscariot, they were all heartily devoted to the cause of truth and righteousness, and physically adapted to a vocation which required much bodily

* Matt. xiii. 53—58.

† x. 2—42. Mark vi. 7—13. Luke vi. 12—49.

exertion, as well as the constraining love of Jesus; and, morally, they were sincere-minded, and single-hearted,—just such bold, honest, hardy, and comparatively virtuous men, as are usually to be met with in hilly regions.

During their absence, Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate the second passover which occurred during his ministry, and wrought a miracle there, which occasioned much displeasure and mortification to the priesthood. Between Saint Stephen's gate and the area of the temple, opposite to the sheep-market, adjoining the field of Kedron, where the cattle were folded for the sacrifices, there is a deep basin of water, formed from the soft and gentle stream of Siloa, called the pool of Bethesda. In the time of Christ, it was surrounded by stately porticoes with five entrances; and from the crevice of the rock in which it had been sunk, a spring of water gushed out periodically, endued by a ministering angel with a miraculous healing quality. The blind, the lame, and the diseased, were crowded together, under the shelter of the porches; and whoever first reached the rushing stream, was instantly restored to health by its supernatural virtue. As there had been no open vision, from the days of Malachi, till the annunciation of John the Baptist, the miraculous pool might have been a standing type of the cleansing power of that fountain which was to be opened for sin in the house of David; the miserable objects in

the cloisters representing the depraved condition of mankind, and its utter need of purification. Jesus visited this pool on the Sabbath, and observing a poor emaciated man lying under a porch, who had been for thirty-eight years a victim to extreme debility, resolved to heal him; and addressing him in accents of tender sympathy, said,—“Wilt thou be made whole?” Unconscious that it was the all-powerful Messiah who asked the question, he replied, that he had not a friend to help him quickly enough to reach the stream, nor the means of remunerating any one to perform that service for him. While he was speaking, the Divine energetic command was given,—“Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.” Strength was immediately infused into his frame; he started up, folded the mattrass upon which he had so long reclined, weak and helpless, and departed with it, from the scene of his misery, rejoicing and praising God for his goodness. Some of the Jews, who had witnessed the miracle with much indignation, reproved him in a tone of marked displeasure, for carrying his bed on the Sabbath; but he justified the act, by referring to the all-powerful authority which had commanded it. Shortly after, Jesus, meeting with him again in the temple, revealed himself as the Messiah, exhorting him to sin no more, lest he should incur a far greater calamity, even the loss of God’s favour, and of the light of his countenance. Greatly affected by the condescension and

pardoning mercy of his gracious Deliverer, he in the simplicity of his mind, returned to the angry Jews, and acquainted them with his blessed discovery, that it was the Saviour who had cured his malady. But they only cavilled against the miracle, and "sought to slay Him," for performing it on the Sabbath. Jesus vindicated the deed, by asserting the power of his Godhead, which sustained, upheld, and governed the whole fabric of creation, on all days alike,—there being no periodical suspension of the influences by which, as one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, He kept the whole universe in motion. Then more explicitly declaring that this Divine power was united to his humanity, He recommended them to search the Scriptures, which plainly revealed his twofold nature; attributing their unbelief, to the natural enmity of their hearts to God and holiness, and to their inordinate spiritual ambition.*

* John v. 1—29, 39.

CHAPTER V.

“ How sweetly flowed the Gospel sound
From lips of gentleness and grace,
When listening thousands gathered round,
And joy and reverence filled the place.”

AFTER Jesus returned from Jerusalem to Galilee, the twelve, having accomplished their missionary tour, retired with Him into the desert of Bethsaida, on the opposite side of the Lake of Tiberias. This expansive sheet of water, on which He frequently condescended to sail, who had “ measured it in the hollow of his hand,” is most interesting and memorable, from its associations with his labours of love and mercy. It is about ten miles long, and five or six broad, and consists of a basin sunk in a lofty table-land, broken down to its edge in steep cliffs and abrupt ravines; so that the road rises sometimes to the lake, and sometimes descends to its margin. It is bordered with picturesque scenery,

usually over-canopied by a sky of intense blue, and is almost equal in grandeur to the lake of Geneva. The lower grounds produce the walnut, palm, fig, and olive, in perfection; while the rose-laurels beneath their shade fringe the rocky shore, and droop their tufted flowery branches over the calm waters, interspersed with the myrtle, the crimson oleander, quivering reeds, and a variety of fragrant shrubs and flowers. The eastern and northern coasts display a sublime scene of massive mountains rising abruptly from the sea, their sides covered with a carpet of luxuriant herbage, softened by graceful undulations; while in the remote distance, the snowy summit of Hermon glitters in the sunshine.

The ship that conveyed the blessed Saviour to Bethsaida did not escape the observation of the multitude who thronged the shore, hungering after the bread of life, and seeking to be healed of their diseases. Bent on the attainment of their object, they followed it along the coast, and were the first to reach the landing-place. When Jesus, on disembarking, saw the strand and the adjoining hills thronged with people, eager to hear Him, and to experience his healing power, his tender heart was so moved with pity, that, with his characteristic self-denial, He relinquished all thoughts of present quiet and repose, to minister to their necessities. Therefore, ascending the grassy plain above the level of the sea, He taught them "many things, and

healed the sick," who had been brought to Him from the adjacent cities. By this time, they had become faint with hunger, for in their eagerness to overtake Jesus, they had forgotten to bring provisions, which were not to be procured in the desert. However, five barley loaves and two small fishes were collected among them, and these He determined to multiply for their sustenance. Having commanded them to be divided into twelve sections, and seated on the grass, that the apostles might minister to them with due order and regularity, He took of that scanty store, and looking up to the Father, who ever co-operated in his miracles, He brake the bread, and divided the fishes, till every one was abundantly satisfied. When the repast was concluded, a great overplus remained, and twelve baskets full of fragments were collected, after five thousand men besides women and children had been fed. And as females usually preponderate wherever the Word of God is preached, the number may be estimated at more than double that amount. The sun had by this time cast its last beams upon the lake, reflecting from its smooth and glassy surface, a rich empurpled tint of light on the surrounding scenery. He therefore dismissed them, and they departed, refreshed in mind and body, and deeply convinced that they had seen and heard the "Prophet like unto Moses, which should come into the world." So great was the love and admiration with which they were inspired by

his gracious doctrines and acts of benevolence, that they longed to proclaim his sovereignty, under a persuasion that He was to be a temporal prince, who would deliver them from the yoke of the Roman Empire. Jesus "knew within Himself" that they had resolved to return and "take Him by force, and make Him a king" at the first opportunity, and therefore, to avoid their purpose, He determined on returning to Capernaum.

But, previous to his departure, He ascended the heights of one of the mountains of Magdala, to enjoy alone, the solace of communion with God the Father. Often, when the world was hushed into repose and slumber, did He pass such hallowed seasons of devotion; for in becoming man, He had rendered himself dependant on his Father's love, for the sweet and refreshing consolations of his presence and co-operation in all his works of benevolence and mercy.

"Cold mountains and the midnight air,
Witnessed the fervour of his prayer."

The disciples had been commanded to precede Him to the opposite coast, and the evening being calm and serene, they embarked on a sea smooth and clear as the polished crystal. But before they had gained much distance, a cool breeze sprang up from the lofty table-lands, and rushing down upon the lake, began to ruffle and toss up its placid surface: or contrary winds set in suddenly against the strong current of the river Jordan. However this might be,

the lake speedily became one vast sheet of foam, and the white-headed breakers dashing proudly on the rugged beach, changed its gentle murmur into a wild and mournful sound, by the whistling of the wind, and the noise of the agitated waters. Jesus knew that they were struggling against the storm; therefore, about the fourth watch of the night, He descended to the shore, from whence He beheld them toiling and rowing upon the angry waves, and in momentary peril of being engulfed in a watery sepulchre. Immediately hastening to their relief, He placed his sacred feet upon the rough billows, as they heaved to and fro, and walked towards the ship, with as firm a step as on a pavement of adamant. The disciples, perceiving his approach, exclaimed in much terror,—“It is a spirit!” but were convinced of his identity, when his well-known voice saluted their ears, just in the gracious tones He often still whispers to his redeemed, while sailing in their frail bark through this stormy and perilous world,—“Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, I am thy God.” Peter, scarcely able to believe the evidence of his senses, exclaimed,—“Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.” The command was instantly given, and the attempt made, but Peter’s courage failing under the violence of the tempest, he would have sunk, had Jesus stretched forth his hand, and lifted him reproving his want of faith, as He con- to the ship; when He silenced the storm,

and they speedily reached the land of Gennesareth. "And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased; and besought Him that they might only touch the hem of his garment; and as many as touched Him were made perfectly whole."*

On the following day, a great crowd collected on the place of the multiplication of bread, as Jesus had anticipated, in hopes of obtaining another miraculous supply of sustenance. They were greatly disappointed on discovering that He was gone to the other side of the lake, and unwilling to relinquish the object they had in view, were determined to follow in pursuit of Him. Entering some passage-boats, which were at that moment returning empty to Tiberias, they at length traced Him to the synagogue in his own city. Knowing the motive which had brought them there, He expatiated on the primary importance of spiritual above temporal interests, in order to lead their minds to things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. Touched in some degree, by the power of his words, but still ignorant of his real nature and redemption offices, they inquired, how they "might work the works of God?" He assured them, that faith in Him was the only condition upon which salvation could be obtained; but such was their insensibility and dulness of perception, that they

* Matt. xiv. 13—36.

could see no beauty in Him. Persevering in their desire of another miraculous supply of food, they intimated it by an allusion to the manna that fell in the wilderness. With a sublimity, transcending human thought, Jesus explained that very substance to have been sent as a type of himself,—the spiritual support and strength of the soul, in the same sense as bread is the staff of the body. Incapable of comprehending the symbol, which implied that He was come to bestow everlasting life, they understood it only in its literal meaning, and exclaimed, “Lord, evermore give us this bread!” After reproving their unbelief, He still further asserted the absolute security of all, who, with true faith, cast themselves on the merciful free grace of Divine electing love and goodness. They listened to this comfortable assurance with incredulity, which Jesus attributed to their natural incapacity to receive Him as a Saviour, and to rely on his imputed righteousness, unless made willing by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. But caring little for their immortal interests, and disappointed in their hopes of a temporal kingdom, all who were merely nominal disciples, “went back and walked no more with Him,” protesting against, what they considered, his “hard” and intolerable sayings. “Then said Jesus unto the twelve,—Will ye also go away?” Peter replied, in the name of all, with fervent expressions of faith and attachment, that there was none other

who could save, and bestow upon them the blessings of eternity.*

“Lord, should we leave thy hallowed feet,
To whom could we repair?

Where else such holy comforts meet,
As spring eternal there?

“Unmingled joys,—’t is thine to give,
And undecaying peace;
For thou canst teach us so to live,
That life shall never cease.”

Soon afterwards, Jesus went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, to meet and bless a spiritual daughter of Abraham, who was a native of Syrophoenicia, and of Grecian origin. Avoiding the cities which lay in his path, He confined himself to the beautifully bordered seashore, overshadowed with plantations of orange, citron, palm, and mulberry trees. “And entered” privately “into a house,” which stood there in a secluded spot, “and would have no man know” of his arrival, “but could not be hid.” The woman, whose calamity He intended to remove, heard of his presence in her neighbourhood,—traced Him to this retreat, and falling at his feet, exclaimed, in an agony of maternal sorrow,—“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” This recognition of Him as the Messiah, was a marvellous instance of faith, in a Gentile, and to manifest its strength, Jesus made no immediate answer. But, as He expected, his silence

* John vi. 22—71.

only induced her to persevere in her entreaties. The disciples, ignorant of the motive which occasioned Him to delay granting her petition, and anxious to put a stop to her importunities, interceded in her favour. In reply, He urged the paramount claim of the Jews, to whom his personal ministry was more especially restricted. Undiscouraged by this argument the woman still continued to worship Him as God, and to implore his mercy, under a strong persuasion, that He was incapable of resisting an appeal to the tender sensibilities of his loving nature. But determined that her faith should have its perfect work, He said, in a figure of speech proverbial among the Jews, to express their contempt for the heathen,—“It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to dogs.” She meekly acquiesced in the distinction, but dexterously turned it to her own advantage, by asking only for a dog’s share in his goodness, which He could bestow, according to his own reasoning, without infringing upon his benevolence to others. Her faith triumphed and gained its reward. “Her daughter was made whole from that very hour,” and on her return home, she found her reposing on a bed, in a sweet and comfortable slumber.*

In his way from the borders of Syria, Jesus was met on the coast of Decapolis, by a party, who implored Him, to lay his hand “upon a man who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech.”

* Mark vii. 24—30.

He acquiesced instantly, and graciously leading him to a retired nook near the sea, "put his fingers into his ears, and spit and touched his tongue." On this, as on some other occasions, using external means, which, in conjunction with his omnipotent Ephphatha, unloosed the string of the tongue of this afflicted man, and opened his ears, to hear that voice, which spake as no other man could speak.

No doubt, the first words he uttered were employed in the praises of his Divine Benefactor, who in vain charged him and his friends, not to publish the miracle. "Beyond measure astonished," they could not help proclaiming,—“He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.” *

On his return to Galilee, Jesus ascended one of the mountains which embosom the Sea of Tiberias, and was speedily followed by a vast assemblage of afflicted beings, full of faith in his power to restore their lost limbs and impaired faculties. After remaining there three days, till they were all healed, and instructed in the way of salvation, their provisions were consumed, with the exception of "seven barley loaves and a few small fishes." These, Jesus multiplied, with his usual benevolent regard to human necessities, till the hunger of all was appeased, that He might "not send them away fasting." Their number consisted on this occasion, of "four thousand men, besides women and children." †

* Mark vii. 31—37.

† Matt. xv. 29—39.

When they had all departed to their respective homes, He entered a ship, and sailed immediately to the coasts of Magdala and Dalmanutha. He was there met by a deputation of Pharisees, demanding a special sign from heaven, (probably by some splendid appearance in the sky,) to prove that He was the Messiah. He "sighed deeply in spirit," over their unbelief and obduracy, after so many evidences had been afforded of the truth of his pretensions, and reproved their hypocrisy, by referring them, as usual, to his approaching death and resurrection; and their wilful blindness, by a reference to the indications of the political atmosphere concerning his advent, while they could readily conjecture the state of the weather, from the appearance of the clouds at sunrise and at sunset. On returning to the vessel, He warned his disciples, against the corrupt doctrines with which the Pharisees had leavened the Scriptures, by infusing into them the deadly weed of human tradition, which entangled and obstructed the pure wheat of Divine inspiration. As they had only one loaf, and had forgotten to provide more, they imagined that this admonition was intended as a reproof for the omission. But, to confute that false notion, He reminded them of the evidences they had witnessed, of his power to produce bread, on two urgent occasions. Light then gleamed on their minds, and they comprehended his meaning. They landed on a beautiful rocky shore near Tarsaida, at that time a place of great commercial

importance. On entering the town, a blind man was brought to Jesus, with urgent entreaties that He would restore him to sight, by his all-powerful touch. With his characteristic courtesy and condescension, He immediately took him by the hand, guided his uncertain steps through the busy streets, to a secluded spot in the environs, and there performed the miracle, by a gradual process; and afterwards dismissed him, with an injunction, not to reveal it in Bethsaida. Most likely, on account of the infidelity which prevailed there, and implicated it in the woes pronounced on Chorazin, for despising their peculiar privileges.*

The next place Jesus visited, was Cesarea Philippi, near the spring-head of the river Jordan, surrounded by a rich and luxuriant country, and, at that time, distinguished by its wealth and architectural grandeur. For Philip the Tetrarch had beautified it with splendid edifices, especially with an elegant temple, erected in honour of the Emperor Augustus. While in this neighbourhood, He made the interesting inquiry of his disciples, concerning the general opinion of his origin and real nature. Under the enlightening influences of the Holy Ghost, Peter in reply, avowed his own belief, in the grand and sublime truth of his Godhead. Jesus assured him that his divinity was indeed the rock upon which his church was to be erected. And that, although all her members

* Mark viii. 22—26.

must be brought down to the dust of the grave, yet, through Him, they would triumph over death, by a glorious resurrection. In the same breath, He committed to Peter and to the rest of his apostles, the care of publishing his Gospel, which would be a perpetual savour of life to the believer, and a savour of death to the unbeliever, as alone revealing the terms, on which the sinner can obtain pardon,—absolution not belonging to any human authority. He at the same time charged them not to tell any man that He was the Messiah, while He continued upon earth ; and tenderly began to prepare their minds for his approaching ignominious death, and propitiatory sacrifice. Peter's warm and affectionate spirit, rose in opposition to such a voluntary yielding of himself into the hands of his enemies ; and, seizing hold of his garment, with great earnestness he remonstrated against it. The zeal of Jesus, for the honour and glory of the Divine attributes was not, however, to be so easily quenched ; therefore, turning on him a look of disapprobation, at his unconscious hostility to the will of God the Father, He repulsed him with a rebuke, for thus concurring in the usurpations of Satan. At the same time He inculcated the necessity of self-denial, on all who desired to tread in his footsteps and follow Him into the realms of holiness and immortality,—to purchase which, for them, his death was expedient. For their consolation, under this trying separation, He promised to see them again on earth,

in his risen humanity, and, that they should witness his ascension to heaven, from whence, He would pour down an unction of the Holy Ghost, to anoint them to preach the Gospel,—“Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”*

* Matt. xvi. 13—28.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Away, ye dreams of mortal joy !
Raptures divine, my thoughts employ ;
I see the King of glory shine,
And feel his love, and call Him mine.

“ On Tabor, thus his servants view’d
His lustre, when transform’d He stood ;
And bidding earthly scenes farewell,
Cried, Lord, ’tis pleasant here to dwell.

“ Yet still, our elevated eyes,
To nobler visions long to rise :
That grand assembly would we join,
Where all thy saints around thee shine.”

Six days after his conversation with the apostles, near Cesarea Philippi, Jesus vouchsafed a peculiar manifestation of his Godhead to Peter, James, and John, as a prelibation of the beatific vision, before they should witness his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. At one extremity of the rich plain of Esdraelon, stands Mount Tabor,—a vast limestone rock, in shape a truncated cone, and towering

above the adjacent mountains in isolated grandeur. According to Josephus, it is thirty furlongs in height, and its steep and rugged sides are mostly covered with forests of oak and pistachio trees, intermingled with rocky fragments, from the interstices of which, spring forth myrtles, and other fragrant shrubs and flowers, the platform also being adorned with much rural beauty. To this eminence Jesus ascended with the three disciples, and displayed to them his glory, as the only begotten of the Father. Lifting up his eyes with devout affection to heaven, He was transfigured, "as He prayed;" "his face shining as the sun" in meridian splendour, "his raiment" becoming "white and glittering as the light," and assuming a transcendent brightness, from the beaming forth of the Divine nature through his humanity. Simultaneously with this sublime manifestation of the great mystery of godliness, Moses and Elijah, who had been waiting in Abraham's bosom for the Divine incarnation, the one fourteen centuries, and the other eight, had crossed the gulph which divided them from earth, with intense interest in the work of redemption, and conversed with their Lord, on the subject of the vicarious sufferings which awaited Him in Jerusalem, and the glorious result of his victories over Satan. The scene thus presented, was grand and beautiful beyond conception; a manifestation of the King in his beauty, too sublime and heavenly for the eyes of mortal men, which threw the apostles into a kind of stupor, and rapt them into such

delightful ecstasy, that they longed to retain for ever the tone of mind induced by so pure and holy a revelation.

“ My willing soul would stay,
In such a frame as this :
And sit, and sing itself away,
To everlasting bliss.”

In this highly wrought and devout frame of mind, and scarcely knowing what he uttered, Peter proposed to erect tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elias, like that in which the Divine glory had condescended to dwell in the wilderness. But while he was speaking, the luminous Shechinah, which indicated the presence of God the Father, overshadowed the mountain; and a voice issued from the lambent cloud testifying to the Divine origin of the Saviour. The disciples fell on their faces overawed, faint, and speechless, but were immediately recovered by the kind and gentle touch of their Lord and Master. “ And when they had lifted up their eyes suddenly, and looked round about, they saw no man any more,” excepting Jesus, whose glory was again veiled under the obscurity of his manhood. As they descended the mountain, He charged them not to disclose what they had witnessed till after his death and resurrection, which gave rise to some discussion, they being at present incapable of understanding his mysterious allusion.*

On reaching the plain, they found a great multi-

* Matt. xvii. 1—9. Mark ix. 1—10. Luke ix. 29—36.

tude assembled together, and some of them in a state of excitement. Immediately on perceiving Jesus, they ran towards Him, and were struck with amazement at the glory of his countenance, which still retained marks of his transfiguration. He inquired the cause of the commotion so visible among them, and in reply, a man fell on his knees imploring the deliverance of his only child from a dumb spirit, which the disciples had in vain endeavoured to eject, although they were known to have wrought miracles by his Divine power. Their failure arose, in some measure, from the cavils and opposition of some scribes, who were, as usual, mixed in the crowd which was waiting to see Jesus. He rebuked their hostility, and then graciously assured the suppliant that he had only to believe in Him as the Son of God, and a cure was possible. With streaming eyes, and an earnest expression of countenance, the man, implored Him to increase his faith, which he feared was too weak to be available. Jesus responded, by immediately commanding the devil to quit his prey, and to enter no more into his victim. Constrained to obey, it extruded with such violence, as to leave the child on the ground a corpse in appearance, till the Saviour stretching forth his hand, restored him to animation by a touch, and graciously delivered him to his father. The disciples inquired, why they had been unable to cast out the devil, and were answered, that their want of success

arose partly from a deficiency of faith, with the added remark, "This kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting."*

Jesus now appointed seventy additional missionaries, and sent them forth, two and two, with the same admonitions and directions, as, on a similar occasion, he had given to the twelve; and endued them also with the power of working miracles. Their labours were crowned with amazing success; and, after a short interval, they returned, and gave an account of them, rejoicing that even devils were subject to their command, through the name of Jesus. He replied, that Satan's empire was already shaken to its foundation; and exhorted them "rather to rejoice that their names were written in heaven," as heirs of glory and immortality. Then, "lifting up his eyes" to God the Father, He thanked Him for that distinguishing grace which revealed the wonders of redemption to the teachable and lowly, while they were veiled from the self-righteous, who were wise and prudent in their own opinion; and that He had chosen the unlearned and simple-minded to illuminate the world with his Gospel, in preference to sages and philosophers.†

It seems to have been about this period, that a certain expositor of the law inquired "what he should do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus, knowing the insidious motive which actuated the question, referred

* Matt. xvii. 14—21; Mark ix. 14—27. † Luke x. 1, 24.

him to the Decalogue, as the standard of morality; and asked if he understood and fulfilled its comprehensive, holy demands, without the slightest deviation? He answered that he knew the commandments to be all summed up in the supreme love of God, and in the golden rule of doing to others as we would be done by. Jesus availed himself of the occasion to apply this acknowledgement forcibly to his conscience; but he endeavoured to evade its self-condemning power by another question, which elicited the beautiful parable of the good Samaritan; and, convicting him of deficiency in that perfection of charity which constitutes real holiness, sent him away in confusion.*

The tax collectors for the Temple inquired of Peter, while Jesus was in Capernaum, if his master was amenable to that tribute? Certainly He was exempt from it as the Lord of all things; but as "a debtor to fulfil the whole law;" as his people's surety, He acquiesced in his liability to pay what it demanded, manifesting, at the same time, his omniscience as God, by directing Peter to go down to the sea-shore, and bring up a fish, which would contain in its mouth a coin of sufficient value to defray all that was due, including his disciples.†

Not long after this circumstance, He again visited Judea. While passing through the region of Samaria, James and John went on in advance to

* Luke x. 25—37.

† Matt. xvii. 24—27.

a certain town, to purchase provisions, and to secure a night's lodging ; but the national antipathy of the Samaritans, to whom they made application, induced them to refuse all accommodation, because they were so evidently bound for Jerusalem. They longed to resent the indignity by calling down on them fire from heaven, in imitation of Elias ; but deferred taking any revenge till they had obtained the permission of their Master. When they related to Him the treatment they had received, He rebuked their intemperate zeal, as contrary to the spirit of love, which brought Him down from heaven ; and proceeded on his journey by another road. On reaching the river Jordan, its banks became speedily thronged with people. The parents, who were accompanied by their children, anxious to obtain his blessing on their offspring, implored Him "to lay his hands on them and pray;" but the apostles, incapable of sympathizing in such a request, endeavoured to repulse them as intruders on his time and attention. He reproved their opposition to so commendable a desire, and admonished them to take a lesson from the guileless and simple confidence of helpless infancy,—a child-like spirit being an essential qualification for the due reception of the Gospel. With the most engaging condescension and love, He then encouraged the parents to approach him ; and, taking all their children successively in his arms, bestowed on them his tender benediction,—and most interesting must have been the scene which this

transaction presented. Let us for a moment bring to our imagination the gracious Saviour, who was fairer than the sons of men, standing on the picturesque border of the meandering stream, overshadowed by the stately trees which decked its margin; the rocky eminences above, and the shore beneath, crowded with men and women carrying their helpless babes, or leading their artless little ones, whose minds were sufficiently expanded to appreciate the kind and affectionate expression of his divine countenance,—and can anything be conceived more transcendantly beautiful? *

In his way back to Galilee, Jesus was met by a wealthy young Jew, who, filled with admiration of his holy and amiable character, and struck with the mild majesty and the dignity of his superhuman appearance, fell prostrate before him, and inquired with apparent earnestness, what “he should do to inherit eternal life?” He replied, that the epithet “good” belonged to God only, and referred him to the Ten Commandments as the standard of moral virtue. These he professed to have observed strictly from his earliest youth. Jesus regarded him with affection; but, to convince him of his great deficiency in the virtue of self-denial, said, “Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up thy cross, and follow me.” The only object of

* Mark x. 13—16.

this proposal was to teach him to know himself better; the desired effect was produced; it touched him to the quick, and sent him away full of regret and sorrow, "for he had great possessions," which he had not the heart (nor was it in human nature,) so readily to relinquish, unless made willing by Divine power. *

While preaching in the synagogue, after his return to Galilee, the compassionate heart of Jesus was moved to pity by the sight of a spiritual daughter of Abraham, who had been for eighteen years afflicted with extreme infirmity,—her frame being bent nearly double; and yet she was unremitting in her attendance on public worship. With kind sympathy in her deplorable condition, Jesus called her to Him, and, as she moved forward, uttered the omnipotent words, "Thou art loosed from thine infirmity." The moment she reached Him, He "graciously laid his hands on her," and suddenly, to her inconceivable joy and astonishment, she found herself standing erect, and glorifying God for his unexpected mercy. The ruler, in his ignorance of true religion, and hard-hearted bigotry, instead of rejoicing in her deliverance from so severe an affliction, indignantly upbraided her for being healed on the Sabbath. Jesus, by unanswerable arguments, convicted him of hypocrisy, and silenced his reproaches. †

sons of Joseph, who had been brought up

Mark x. 17—27.

† Luke xiii. 10—17.

with Jesus, and were, therefore, called his brethren, had enjoyed many opportunities of witnessing his perfections, yet they disbelieved his mission, and despised his pretensions to be the Saviour. When the Feast of Tabernacles drew nigh, they sarcastically challenged Him to go to Jerusalem, and there publicly display his miracles, taunting Him for operating, as they said, in secret, while, if He were really the Messiah, He must aspire to be known openly. Jesus answered, that He did not intend to venture quite so soon among his enemies, whose spirit was too congenial with their own, to excite any animosity towards them, while "they hated Him," and, therefore, advised them to depart without waiting for his company. Soon after their departure, He followed them privately, and, on reaching Bethany, was hospitably received into the house of Lazarus. While the noon-day meal was preparing, He sat down, and instructed all present in the way of salvation; and Mary, who was of a contemplative and pensive turn of mind, placed herself at his feet, with holy reverence and faith in Him as her beloved Lord and Saviour. Martha also entertained the deepest respect and affection for Him; but her manner of expressing those sentiments was more in accordance with her active and impulsive temperament. The duties of hospitality devolving chiefly upon herself as the eldest, rendered her too intent on providing the best possible repast for their sacred and distinguished

guest, to afford time for listening to the ineffably sweet words of truth and wisdom which flowed from his gracious lips, while Mary's whole attention was riveted upon every sentence He uttered. Martha would gladly have had her assistance, and was so annoyed with her for withholding it, she could not refrain, in the hurry of the moment, from exclaiming, "Lord, dost not thou care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me." He replied by a kind and gentle reproof of her over anxiety about the concerns of the perishable body, and applauded Mary's preference for the interests of the soul, which must be prepared by Divine teaching, for glory and immortality. *

On the following day, Jesus repaired to the Feast of Tabernacles. The scene Jerusalem presented on this occasion was peculiarly beautiful and animating. The flat terraces on the roofs of the houses were covered with tents and arbours, tastefully constructed with branches of the various trees which grew in Judæa, the glare of the white buildings being relieved by groups of the dark fig-tree, or the solitary palm, while the streets appeared all alive with crowds of people engaged in performing their Zulah. This ceremony consisted in carrying in the right hand a palm branch, with its cluster of ripe dates, two
-hs of the weeping willow, and three sprigs of

* Luke x. 38—42.

sweet-scented myrtle, tied together; and in the left, a branch of the citron tree, studded with fruit; these they reverently waved towards the four cardinal points; while hosannas were sung in harmonious strains to the God of heaven, in praise of his goodness and beneficence. As the people traversed the broad ways of Jerusalem, they sometimes discussed the pretensions of Jesus to be the Messiah, in an under tone, for "fear" of his adversaries; anxiously inquiring, whether it was likely He would make his appearance at the festival.

Their curiosity was gratified about the fourth or fifth day, after the animal sacrifices had been offered to God with the fine flour and libations of wine. He then openly entered the temple, and with a holy intrepidity and zeal for his Father's glory, preached with such unparalleled unction and wisdom as greatly amazed the Rabbis, who, judging of Him as a mere man, inquired from whence He could possibly have derived his intellectual pre-eminence? He assured them in reply, that it was not the fruit of human learning, but derived immediately from God the Father, who had invested Him with his office. Then unveiling their secret designs against his life, He justified his Sabbath miracles, and admonished them not to judge by mere outward appearances, but according to the rules of truth and holiness.

On the eighth day of the feast, when the first-fruits of the last crop had been presented in the temple,

and water from the fountain of Siloam mingled with wine had been poured out at the foot of the altar, and Isaiah's jubilant song of salvation had been sung in full chorus, Jesus stood up in a conspicuous place, from whence He could be distinctly heard and seen by the surrounding multitude, and cried aloud,—“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” The effect produced on some of the audience by this invitation, was the power of God unto salvation; while others, in reference to his supposed birth-place, cavilled against Him as a Nazarene. The Sanhedrim, jealous of his popularity, had “sent officers to take Him” into custody; but they stood in the crowd, transfixed with amazement at his gracious doctrines, and were too much overawed to lay hands upon Him. They therefore returned to the Jewish authorities, and justified their disobedience to the orders they had received, by expressing a strong persuasion of his unparalleled wisdom and eloquence. “Never man spake like this man.” The disappointed senators angrily retorted,—“Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on Him?” Nicodemus, however, ventured to express his abhorrence of their injustice, which so aggravated their rage that they furiously dissolved the assembly.*

On the following morning, while He was preaching in the temple, the scribes and Pharisees brought a

* John vii.

woman before Him, whom they had detected in a breach of the seventh commandment, insidiously asking his opinion, how she ought to be dealt with? Knowing that their object was to entangle Him in a snare, He made no immediate reply, but, stooping down, wrote with his finger on the ground, while they clamorously insisted on an answer. Had He sanctioned the legal punishment of stoning to death, they would have reproached his want of that meekness and compassion, which were to be the Messiah's leading characteristics. And, had He endeavoured to save the culprit's life, they would have charged Him with setting at nought the law of Moses. Therefore, standing erect, and fixing upon them his omniscient glance, which pierced their inmost souls, He said, with a peculiar emphasis, which they too well understood,—“He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her;” and again, bending Himself down, “He wrote on the ground” some of their leading sins,—according to a Greek manuscript. Conscience-smitten, and unable any longer to look Him in the face, they gradually retreated from the temple one by one, leaving the woman alone with Jesus, in an attitude of sorrow, fear, and trembling. Commiserating her humiliating condition, He dismissed her uncondemned, with an injunction to “sin no more;” which no doubt powerfully affected her heart, and

influenced her to become a reformed believer in Him as her Saviour. *

He then returned to the treasury, and resumed his instructions. As the bright rays of the sun were at that moment diffusing lustre and cheerfulness on all around, He referred to it as a type of Himself,—the spiritual luminary of the world,—exhorting his hearers to “walk in his light,” which would guide them to holiness and immortality. The Pharisees denied the truth of this assertion, under pretence that it rested only upon his own testimony; and when He still further revealed his twofold nature, they offered to lay violent hands upon Him as guilty of blasphemy; but since “his hour was not yet come,” they were restrained by an invisible power. He then alluded to his return to heaven through a path of vicarious suffering, by their instrumentality, and some present professed a willingness to receive Him as the Messiah. But, knowing the deep-rooted animosity of their hearts against Him, He brought their sincerity to the touchstone of the more humbling doctrines of his Gospel, especially that which implied their servitude to sin and Satan, since it struck at the opinion so general among them, that by natural descent from Abraham they were entitled to all his privileges. Jesus denied that the individuals who
‘ed his words and “sought to kill Him,” could

* John xiii. 1—11.

- be his children in a spiritual sense, since such infidelity only served to evince them to be the offspring of the devil, who "was a murderer from the beginning." Enraged at this exposure of their real character, they immediately changed their tone, and called Him opprobrious names, and while He persisted in vindicating his Divine nature, prepared to stone Him, in a paroxysm of fury. But having a far different death in prospect, He "passed through the midst of them," by rendering Himself invisible.*

* John viii. 12—59.

CHAPTER VII.

"The sinner sleeping in his grave,
Shall at my voice awake;
And when I once begin to save,
My work I ne'er forsake.

"To thee we look, to thee we bow,
To thee for help we call;
Our life and resurrection thou—
Our hope, our joy, our all."

IN his way from the temple, an immediate opportunity occurred to Jesus of demonstrating his Godhead power. He beheld "a man who was blind from his birth," and resolved to bestow on him the faculty of vision. Assuming sin to be the source of suffering, the disciples inquired, whether his total privation of sight had been entailed on him as a punishment for the transgressions of his parents, or on account of his own hereditary participation of a sinful nature? Jesus repudiated the idea that his affliction had been sent in judgment, and affirmed

that it was designed in the providence of God, to display his own essentially Divine power, which his enemies had just so insultingly denied.

Moistening some clay with his saliva, He immediately anointed the man's eyes, and sent him to wash it off in the waters of Siloam. He readily obeyed, and turning to the south of the temple, went quickly through the gate of Ophel to the pool, a few paces above the valley of Tyropeon. Descending the steps of the dome-covered fountain, he performed his ablution in the soft refreshing stream, "and came back to Jesus, seeing" clearly. What were his sensations on opening his eyes upon the transparent water, and for the first time in his life beholding the cheerful light of the sun, the blue firmament speckled with fleecy clouds, the green earth, and the various objects of art and nature, as they were gradually unfolded to his astonished view, it is not easy to imagine! Great also must have been the surprise of his relatives, and of the friends who had been accustomed to bestow alms upon him "by the way side," on perceiving the new and animated expression of his countenance, which had formerly appeared dull and melancholy. "Some said, This is he; others, He is like him." But when he explained the miracle which so greatly transcended any human power, they could not rest satisfied till the matter was investigated. They therefore conducted him to the Sanhedrim, which was then sitting, where he under-

went a strict examination. The miracle was too well attested to be publicly denied. The hostile portion of the senators, therefore, merely affirmed, that it could not be of God, because it had been wrought on the Sabbath. Some of the less bigoted (Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea included) argued, that since it implied a Divine power, none but a sinless man could have performed it. But, disregarding this wise reasoning, they endeavoured to puzzle the mendicant by cross questions, who confounded them by the acuteness, candour, and good sense of his answers. They in vain endeavoured to extort something from his fears, by sternly expressing an opinion, that the whole story was a delusion or fabrication. He boldly refuted the accusation.

The senators had now no resource but to deny that he had ever been blind at all, since his eyes possessed such a sound, bright, transparent appearance; and sending for his parents, endeavoured to terrify them into acquiescence in this hypocritical assertion. But, with a shrewdness which their son seems to have inherited, they cautiously avoided implicating themselves, lest their testimony should expose them to the disadvantages of being "put out of the synagogue." They recognised him to be their son, and acknowledged that he had been born blind, but evaded expressing any opinion concerning the miracle. Thus foiled by these people, they again summoned the man before the council, and tried to

extinguish his belief that it had been wrought by Jesus, by referring it to some secret process of nature, through the interposition of Divine providence. "Give God the praise," said they, "we know that this man is a sinner." He quickly and simply answered, "Whether He be a sinner I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." And with an instinctive perception of their enmity against his unknown benefactor, he refused to be examined any further, retorting ironically, "Will ye also be his disciples?" and with great spirit defended Him as an inspired teacher. This was too much for their proud hearts to endure from a mendicant, and they vented their displeasure by excommunicating him.

Jesus knowing all things which had occurred, sought him out, and graciously inquired if he believed in Himself as the Messiah? Impressed with a notion that He it was to whose power and mercy he was indebted for the blessing of sight, he answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" Jesus in reply, revealed Himself, and was worshipped by him as his God and Saviour. Then, turning to some Pharisees who were watching them with malicious eyes, seeking only to find an occasion against Him, He reproved their desperate infidelity, which, unless removed by a similar faith to that displayed by the mendicant, must end in the blackest darkness for ever.*

* John ix.

During the ensuing winter, at the festival of the dedication of the temple, Jesus resumed his ministry. It was then celebrated on the anniversary of Herod's coronation, to attest his munificence, in having adorned that edifice with much architectural beauty. While walking in Solomon's porch, the gracious Saviour gave a touching description of his Church, under the similitude of a sheep-fold, into which none could enter but through Himself, the only true Shepherd, who had come to lay down his life for its redemption. He signified his intention of incorporating the Gentiles among the Jews, and described the voluntary nature of the sacrifice He was about to make for their sins, that He might become the first-fruits of their resurrection, which occasioned much division of opinion among his hearers, concerning the nature of his mission. The consciences of some were alarmed, who, gathering round Him in great excitement, exclaimed, "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." He replied by a reference to his miracles, which proved Him to be the Son of God, who had secured from everlasting the salvation of all who believed in Him, and became his disciples. Enraged at his high pretensions, and still more provoked by the doctrine of free grace, which struck a death-blow on their pride and self-righteousness, they rushed violently upon Him, with stones in their hands to kill Him, for what they considered to be the

sin of blasphemy; but "He escaped out of their hand," quitted Jerusalem, and took refuge in Bethabara.*

While in this retirement, a messenger came to Him from Bethany, with the sad tidings that Lazarus was dangerously ill, implying a hope on the part of his sisters, that He would come and restore him by a miracle. It being his intention to leave him to die, that He might raise him from the tomb as a living testimony of his Divine vivifying power, He waited till two more days had elapsed, and his dissolution had taken place, and then proposed to his disciples, to accompany Him to Bethany; but they opposed his returning so near to Jerusalem, on account of the late attempt of the Jews to kill Him. In reply to the fears they expressed for his safety, He urged the necessity of completing all the work his Father had given Him to do in a limited time, adding, "I go to awake Lazarus out of sleep." Supposing him to be only in a deep slumber, they interpreted that circumstance as a favourable symptom, till Jesus explicitly assured them that he was already dead, but that He intended to bring him to life, as a further evidence of his Divine power. Thomas then expressed a willingness to accompany Him at any risk, and the rest concurring in his feeling of devotedness and attachment, immediately consented to go at all hazards, and they reached the tomb of Lazarus four days after his interment.

* John x. 22—42.

Martha speedily heard of the arrival of Jesus, and believing that his presence a few days earlier would have averted their affliction, she hastened to Him, exclaiming, in a tone of regret—"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." In accents of the tenderest sympathy, Jesus intimated that he should yet be restored to the bosom of his family. But Martha, not apprehending his meaning, imagined that He referred to their reunion at the general resurrection, and was further instructed in that glorious mystery. She then returned home, and privately communicated to Mary, that their Lord was in the neighbourhood, and had specially inquired for her. Roused in some degree from the grief and sorrow into which their sad bereavement had plunged her mind, she went instantly to meet Him, fell prostrate at his feet, uttered the same lamentation concerning his absence, and touching affiance nevertheless in his power and goodness, as her sister had expressed, with a pathetic allusion to his love for her brother. Indeed, no other family seems to have been so greatly honoured with the friendship of Jesus as that of Lazarus. There is no innocent sentiment incident to humanity which He did not possess in infinite perfection, and under his hospitable roof where He so often rested and refreshed his weary frame, it was his delight to reciprocate the affection with which He had inspired him and his amiable sisters. When the mourners, I not quitted the house since the funeral,

discovered that Mary had left it, they supposed that she was gone to weep over her brother's grave, and therefore immediately followed her footsteps, to mingle their tears together. Jesus was deeply moved at the sight of their mutual grief, his tender sympathies were kindled, and groaning in the bitterness of his spirit over the sufferings which sin had entailed on its victims, He shed tears of holy sensibility, such as could only flow from the eyes of the Son of God.—“Jesus wept.”

The tomb of Lazarus was in one of the branching caverns of those limestone rocks which stand near Bethany, consisting of two cells, one above the other. Jesus approached this mournful bed of death, still groaning over the lamentable consequences of the fall, and commanded the stone which closed the entrance to be rolled away. Ignorant of his gracious intention, Martha suggested that decomposition must have begun, since the corpse had lain in the grave four days already. That circumstance had been purposely intended to render the miracle the more convincing, therefore He replied, “Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” Immediately lifting up his eyes to heaven, to evince that the power He was about to exercise came from thence, He said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always: but because of the

people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." Then, turning towards the cell, which contained the dead body, He cried with a loud and omnipotent voice,—“Lazarus, come forth!” A mighty energy attended the summons, and constrained the separate soul to re-enter the lifeless clay, and reanimate it with strength and vitality. And Lazarus, by a sudden impulse, slid over the side of the niche* which had held him in the pale arms of mortality, and stood upright, gazing with amazement at his beloved Lord, and at the scene around him, which must have appeared more like a dream than a reality, till the truth began to flash upon his mind, and he comprehended the mystery. The grave-clothes which swathed his limbs, and the fillets that encircled his head, were speedily exchanged for his ordinary apparel, and he was restored to his home and to his sisters, to their mutual felicity. What his feelings were towards that beloved Saviour, who for his own glory had restored him again to this mortal life, must be left to the imagination of the reader. Many Jews were converted by the miracle, but others, still hardened beyond the power of conviction, revealed it to the Pharisees, who fearing that it would occasion them to be more than ever eclipsed in the sight of the people, and sink them into insignificance, immediately assembled the Sanhedrim, to consult

* Calmet.

how they should best preserve their ecclesiastical and political power. "What do we?" said they, "for this man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him," and constrain Him to assume the sovereignty, which will draw upon us the hostility of "the Romans, who will come and take away both our place and nation." While thus deliberating, how to put down a religion of too spiritual a nature to be welcomed by the worldly-minded formalist, the Holy Ghost came upon Caiaphas, and like Balaam, he prophesied concerning this glorious Star, which had risen out of Jacob for the salvation of his people. That He should "die not for that nation only," but that He should "gather together in one, the children of God that were scattered abroad." That artful and obdurate high priest, desperately bent on the destruction of Jesus, scrupled not to use the prediction as an argument to favour his malicious design. The Emperor Tiberius, he knew, was peculiarly jealous of everything that might be supposed to interfere with his prerogative, and he hoped to propitiate his favour, by causing the innocent Saviour to be put to death as one guilty of disaffection to the empire. But as his hour was not yet come, He immediately retired to "Ephraim," near the wilderness of Judea, there to await its arrival, when He resolved to go up to Jerusalem, finish the work his Father had given Him to do, and then yield

Himself up a willing Sacrifice, into the hands of his enemies. Great efforts were made, but in vain, to discover his retreat, a decree also was published, undoubtedly offering an ample reward, ordaining, "that if any one knew" the place of his concealment, "he should show it, that they might take Him."*

* John xi.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Hosanna to king David’s Son,
Who reigns on a superior throne;
We bless the Prince of heavenly birth,
Who brings salvation down to earth.
Let every nation, every age,
In this delightful work engage;
Old men and babes in Zion sing—
The growing glories of her King.”

WHEN the time drew nigh for the celebration of his last passover, Jesus accordingly quitted Ephraim, with the strong magnanimous determination of delivering Himself into the hands of his enemies. All the dolorous predictions concerning his propitiatory atonement presented themselves to his mind, as He pursued his way to Jerusalem, through the midst of Samaria, along a rugged and precipitous road, stretching through an extensive wilderness. Salome, the mother of James and John, followed Him in this momentous journey, and participating in the general expectation that He would shortly restore

the monarchy of Judah, fell at his feet, imploring Him to advance her sons to the highest posts of honour in his kingdom. Compassionating her ill-directed affection, Jesus tenderly replied, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are" they "able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Coinciding in the ambitious views of their mother, they unhesitatingly answered in the affirmative. Jesus assured them they should indeed experience the fellowship of his sufferings; but that the places they aspired after, had been disposed of in the mind of God from all eternity. The other apostles were filled with indignation and jealousy, when they discovered the nature of Salome's request, but their expressions of anger were silenced by Jesus with an assurance, that the only pre-eminence to be attained in his kingdom, consisted in a meek and lowly devotion to the cause of humanity.*

On reaching the environs of a village in Galilee, his attention was attracted by a group of lepers, who awaited his approach near the highway, standing aloof from all passers by, with due regard to the law, which forbade contact with any one free from their dreadful malady. While they with one voice loudly supplicated his mercy, He glanced on them a look of compassion, which instantly banished their leprosy, they felt their flesh restored to health and

* Matt. xx. 20—28.

soundness. Intent only on hastening to the priest, to get their cure confirmed, they delayed not for one moment to thank their heavenly Physician, with the exception of a Samaritan only, who, more alive to the sentiment of gratitude due to his Divine Benefactor, went back to praise and thank Him for his goodness. The act was applauded, and his soul no doubt emancipated from the far worse leprosy of sin and transgression. *

As Jesus drew nigh to the gates of Jericho, a great concourse of people issued forth to meet and welcome Him, with the homage and respect due to One so mighty in power, and perfect in holiness. Zaccheus, a wealthy revenue officer, attached to the service of the emperor, deeply anxious to behold "the desire of all nations," ran speedily from the city in advance of the crowd, and being short in stature, climbed to the top of a sycamore tree, in order to obtain a better view of Him. To his amazement, he heard himself addressed by Jesus, as He passed by the tree, in a tone of approbation, while He courteously expressed an intention of passing the night in his dwelling. Zaccheus received this condescending information with joy and thankfulness, and hastened home to prepare for the reception of his Divine guest, under a deep persuasion that He was truly the Messiah. So marked a distinction conferred upon the despised tax-collector, excited the indignation of the principal citizens, who claimed the right of

* Luke xvii. 11—19.

precedence in showing hospitality to so distinguished a person, in preference to a man to whom they applied the epithet of "sinner." Zaccheus boldly refuted that objection, by a public profession of his faith in Jesus, and to evince the sincerity of his belief, divested himself of half his property and gave it for the relief of the poor; offering at the same time ample restitution, if he had ever demanded from any one more than was due in the discharge of his office.*

Jesus was too deeply intent on finishing the work of salvation, to tarry longer than one night in Jericho. He continued his journey the next day, and before He had proceeded far, his heart was suddenly filled with intense anguish, at the thoughts of the cup of gall and bitterness which He must needs drink to the dregs, at the approaching pass-over. But, sustained by his inextinguishable love, He resolved to shun neither the agonising transfer of his people's sins, which He was doomed to appropriate as their Surety, nor the ignominy of the cross for their salvation. The expression of grief and sorrow which overspread his countenance, was observed by the apostles with awe and amazement; and as they followed they were afraid."

"The Saviour, what a noble flame
Was kindled in his breast;
When hasting to Jerusalem,
He march'd before the rest.

* Luke xix. 1—10.

" Good will to men, and zeal to God,
His every thought engross ;
He longs to be baptized with blood,
He pants to reach the cross.

" With all his sufferings full in view,
And woes to us unknown,
Forth to the task his spirit flew—
'Twas love that urged Him on."

With these sad anticipations full in his mind, but stedfastly purposed to accomplish his great work of redeeming love at any price, Jesus walked on before his disciples. His course lay through a flowery and well-wooded expanse spotted with thorny shrubs, till He reached a path which led through groves of the feathery palm, fragrant balsams, and roses, rendered luxuriant by the waters of a transparent brook, rushing amid the trees at the foot of a mountain, and fertilizing the adjacent country. The smiling beauty of the scenery must have presented a striking contrast to the mournful countenance of its incarnate Creator. It was, however, soon changed for a melancholy road, intersected with craggy mountains, more in unison with the tone of his feelings. At the termination of this pathway, He came within sight of Bethany, where He purposed to sojourn for a season, which, with its white flat-roofed houses embosomed in olive-trees, appeared like a nest in a grove at the extreme verge of vegetation.

To do honour to such an adorable and sacred

guest, Simon the leper, who had probably experienced his healing power, celebrated his arrival by giving a supper, to which He and his disciples, and Lazarus and his two sisters, were invited. Martha, with her characteristic activity and kindness, waited on her beloved Lord with assiduous attention, while Mary, in accordance with her own more pensive and perhaps more enlightened mind, bestowed on Him a sensible expression of her faith in the sweet-smelling sacrifice which He had engaged to offer to the Father, for the salvation of sinners. Placing herself behind the couch on which He was reclining, she opened an alabaster box of precious ointment extracted from spikenard, and reverently poured its contents upon his head, in such profusion, that it ran down the skirts of his garments over his feet, which she wiped with the ringlets of her hair. Its delicious and refreshing fragrance immediately diffused itself through the house, and delighted the senses of all the company, Judas Iscariot excepted, who, when he had discovered its source, with the avaricious feeling belonging to his sordid nature, and his incapability of appreciating the deed, reproved Mary for her lavish use of so costly an article,—hypocritically insinuating that she ought to have been benefited by the large sum expended on its purchase. Jesus rebuked his unbusiness, by declaring that she had anointed Him for his burial, and that the

praiseworthy action should be recorded in his Gospel, as a perpetual memorial of her love and faithfulness. The traitor then went out and covenanted with the priesthood, to deliver Him into the hands of the Roman soldiers, and to conceal his share in their diabolical conspiracy, directly they had settled the agreement, rejoined the disciples.*

At this supper, Jesus gave a striking representation of his gracious condescension, in having laid aside his glory, and assumed the form of his Father's servant. When the repast was finished, He divested Himself of his upper garment, fastened a towel round his waist, poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet, which hung over the external edge of the couch, and wiped them with the towel which girded Him. Peter vehemently protested against so humiliating an action, and resisted it as far as himself was concerned, till, subdued into acquiescence by an allusion to the purifying efficacy of his atonement,—“If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Such reasoning, though not yet clearly intelligible, overcame every scruple, and he responded with warm-hearted confidence, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” Jesus replied, in reference to the secret plot in which Judas was rendering himself an accomplice,—“Ye are clean, but not all.” There is one of you who will never obtain

* John xii. 1—11, Luke xxii. 4—6.

the benefit of my atonement. Then resuming his vesture, and returning to his seat, He looked round upon them with an expression of tender interest in their welfare, and admonished them that by his own example, He had now taught them to perform the most menial acts of kindness for each other.*

On the following morning, accompanied by his disciples, Jesus entered Bethphage, a place of gardens, where dates and other esculent fruits were cultivated for sale, and dispatched two of them to the opposite village, with directions to "bring a young colt, whereon never man had sat," which they would find "tied up" at a certain place; adding, "If any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of him." They went accordingly, led away the unresisting animal, and "casting their garments upon it, set Jesus thereon." He had no sooner bent his course towards Jerusalem, than multitudes joined Him with branches of palm and myrtle and fragrant shrubs and flowers, which they strewed along the road, as was customary in the paths of heroes and princes,—the only circumstance in which his progress resembled a royal triumph,—for no gorgeously arrayed courtiers followed in his train, nor splendid pageants with martial music. Yet, hosannas of a loftier strain than could apply to any earthly monarch, were sung by the multitudes, in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy,—“Rejoice greatly, O

* John xiii. 1—17.

daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem : behold, thy King cometh unto thee : He is just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."* " Ride on prosperously, thou fairer than the children of men, because of truth, meekness, and righteousness, and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things."†

Descending by a stony path through corn-fields studded with clusters of bright-coloured wild-flowers, the magnanimous Saviour proceeded without stopping, till He reached a projecting knoll which commanded a striking view of Jerusalem, then standing erect in stern impregnable grandeur, surrounded by triple walls, turreted bulwarks, and palaces, terraces, and groves,—her white and golden sanctuary flashing brightly in the sunshine, and her towers rising above the craggy rocks, encompassed by deep ravines and picturesque mountains. On the east, her flowery plain was spread out like a garden, and on the west, her numerous flocks and herds were feeding in the green valleys below, while her hills above were decked with the vine and the palm, the balsam and the honey-dropping sycamore. Jesus contemplated her beauty with the painful consciousness, that in half a century, her proud structures would be levelled to the dust,—her "tabernacles violently taken away,—her solemn feasts and Sabbaths forgotten,"—her "wall and rampart destroyed and languishing

* Zech. ix. 9.

† Ps. xlv. 4.

together,—her gates sunk in the ground, and her bars broken,”—her “habitation swallowed up,”—her children fainting for hunger, at the top of every street,—and her “virgins and young men gone into captivity.”* His exquisite sensibilities were mournfully awakened by these doleful anticipations, and his holy soul was filled with sorrow, at the foresight of such cruel calamities, to be entailed on the Jews by their hard-hearted rejection of Himself. “Oh!” He pathetically exclaimed, while tears of commiseration flowed in torrents down his sacred cheeks, “if thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

When He had given utterance to the feelings of his tender and compassionate heart, Jesus descended the slope into the valley of Kidron, and from thence ascended to the temple. As He entered within the city walls, the people flocked to Him from the environs, and the citizens ran out of their houses into the streets, inquiring with much amazement, “Who is this?” persuaded that one who entered Zion, attended with such hosannas, and yet in so meek and lowly a manner, could be no ordinary a person. The multitude answered, “This is Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth;” while the apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, “rejoiced and praised God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had

* Lam. i. 18; ii. 6—9, 19.

seen, saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." His sovereignty being thus proclaimed, many expected that He would immediately restore David's monarchy in person, believing Him to be the Messiah, from the testimony of the Jews who had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus. The chief priests and Pharisees were now more than ever exasperated by his popularity, and endeavoured to repress the enthusiasm of the people, but finding all their efforts fruitless, they appealed to Himself, and insisted on his calming their transports, and silencing their acclamations. But He replied, in a tone of authority, "I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." Yes, had not their hearts been touched from above on this sublime occasion, inanimate nature must have uttered a piercing shriek at the view of its Creator veiled in a tabernacle of flesh, and entering Jerusalem for the affecting purpose of suffering for the salvation of his perishing creatures. Without further noticing their hostility, Jesus proceeded through the golden gate, and dismounted at the entrance of the outer court, surveyed the state of things in the temple, and at eventide returned to Bethany.*

Early the ensuing morning, before the golden front of the temple was touched by the rising sunbeams, He returned again to Jerusalem. "On the

* Matt. xxi. 1—11, 15—17.

way He hungered." A full-grown fig-tree lay in his path, to all appearance flourishing and fruitful, but He knew it to be destitute of figs, though profusely covered with foliage, and availed himself of that circumstance, to impress on his disciples, that the mere leaves of the outward profession of religion, unproductive of the fruits of righteousness, exposed the hypocrite to everlasting destruction. Approaching the barren tree, He caused it to wither away under his parabolic curse, and which was no sooner pronounced, than instantly, as if smitten with the lightning's blast, it dried up, root and branch, and died.* On reaching the temple, Jesus again reformed the abuses in the court of the Gentiles, which the traffickers in holy things had resumed. They were, as before, awed into submission, to the great displeasure of the leading powers, who, uninfluenced by the Divine authority which ever accompanied his commands, sent a deputation, to inquire of Him, from whence He had received his commission to interfere in their established customs. He replied, by inquiring into the origin of the ministry of John the Baptist, who had testified Him to be the Messiah. Not daring to impugn so credible a testimony, they were reduced to the miserable alternative of pleading ignorance, and were dismissed

†, without an answer to their invidious fresh attempt was then made to

ensnare Him, by a political inquiry concerning the lawfulness of paying tribute to Tiberius. Had He denied his right to levy this mark of national subjection, the Herodians would have apprehended Him as an enemy to the government, and had He justified the claim, the Jews, who disdained a foreign yoke, would have risen up violently against Him. Therefore, with consummate wisdom, He desired them to produce a Roman coin, which He held up to view, demanding whose image and superscription it bore. Cæsar's, was their unanimous reply. He then drew the line of duty between things temporal and things spiritual, and silenced them with a summary admonition, to distinguish between what was due to God, and what was due to the emperor. The free-thinking Sadducees next renewed the assault, by endeavouring to puzzle Him with an artful question, concerning the relationships of a future state of existence, which they disbelieved; for they denied both the resurrection and the existence of angels and spirits. Jesus exposed their ignorance, by unfolding the condition of the saints in glory, and declaring that all human consanguinity belonged exclusively to this present world, and was dissolved at death, when the soul returns to God, to await its resurrection in a spiritual body, when it will resemble the angels both in nature and appearance.

The few nights which now remained of his life upon earth, were passed by Jesus in communion

with his heavenly Father on the Mount of Olives, and his days, in preaching within the precincts of the temple. While thus engaged, some Greek proselytes, who were only allowed admittance into the court of the Gentiles, ardently desired to see Him, and with the most touching simplicity made known their wish to Philip, with a hope that he would inform them of the first favourable opportunity. They were probably acquainted with the Scriptures, which had been for two centuries translated into their native language, as they were evidently prepared to receive Him as the Messiah. Through the medium of Philip, or his brother Andrew, they obtained their object, and when informed of their presence, Jesus answered, with a solemn reference to his approaching death,—“The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” The striking feature of this similitude is, that as the buried grain dies, and after starting into life, produces by perpetual multiplication an abundant harvest, so, by his approaching death, and as the first-fruits of the resurrection, He would redeem to God an innumerable company of sinners.

As not died, He would have been without
He will see of the travail of his soul in a
spring. But much had He to endure
accomplishment of this glorious object.

The waves of affliction were even now beginning to break in upon Him, ere long to immerse Him in the deepest waters; and in bitter anticipation of all the woes that were coming upon Him, He exclaimed,—“Now is my soul troubled,” and shall I call upon my “Father to save me from this hour?” No, that would be to abandon the purpose for which I became incarnate. Then meekly raising his eyes in placid resignation, He said,—“Father, glorify thy name.” Instantly God responded in an audible voice,—“I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” It was heard, but not understood, by all present. Some said that “it thundered,” others, that “an angel spake to Him.” He assured them that the voice was uttered from heaven for their sakes alone, for He required no such testimony of his Father’s love and approbation. He then expatiated on his approaching triumphs over Satan, and on the attractive power of his cross in drawing sinners to Him. Some, nevertheless, still doubted that He was the Messiah, yet “among the chief rulers many believed on Him secretly,” avoiding an open profession of their faith, from a dread of excommunication.* He then interrogated the unbelieving Pharisees concerning the twofold nature of the Messiah, so evidently implied in the hundred and tenth Psalm, which they were unable to answer. “Neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions.”†

* John xii. 20—33, 42.

† Matt. xxii. 41—46.

Having thus silenced his enemies, Jesus sat down near the door of the treasury, from whence He observed the rich as they entered the temple casting large contributions into the chest; but his attention was especially attracted to a poor woman, who, with a feeling of sincere piety, threw into it a very small coin, wholly unconscious whose eye was upon her. Turning to his disciples with an expression of approbation, He remarked, that she had "cast in all her living," in the midst of her want and penury, while the wealthy had only "given of their abundance," and, therefore, could not experience, from their bounty, the inconvenience to which she had exposed herself.*

* Mark xii. 41—44.

CHAPTER IX.

“The King of heaven prepares a feast,
The supper of the Lord;
Not Paradise with all its joys,
Could such delight afford.
Pardon and peace to dying men,
And endless life are given,
And the rich blood that Jesus shed,—
To raise the soul to heaven.”

Two days before the passover, Jesus solemnly concluded his public ministry, by a sublime and awful description of the day of judgment, when seated upon his “great white throne,” all nations will be gathered before Him, divided into only two companies. “And He shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left.” To exemplify how much the smallest exercise of benevolence to the household of faith is noticed in heaven, He described Himself as cordially welcoming his sheep, who had performed labours of love and works of mercy from a Christian principle, into his blood-

bought inheritance, and his people as expressing amazement that He should estimate so highly deeds of which they had scarcely taken any note; to which He will reply,—“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” He then drew an awfully reversed picture of the sentence to be pronounced on such as had no compassion for his suffering and afflicted members,—“These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”*

In his way to Bethany, one evening, Jesus seated himself on a projecting knoll of Mount Olivet, which declines deeply into the funereal valley of Jehoshaphat, from whence He had so recently mourned over Jerusalem with tears of commiseration. The disciples, with some degree of national pride, directed his attention to the huge stones and costly ornaments of the temple, which stood out on the fine heights of Zion in conspicuous grandeur and beauty, while the last glow of the setting sun was lingering on the distant mountains, the branches of the trees were waving in the evening breeze, and all seemed innocence and peace, except to the omniscient eye of Jesus. Fair and lovely was the exterior of the consecrated city, but within lurked every species of vice and wickedness. To the admi-

expressed by the disciples of her proud
s, the monuments of Herod's transitory

* Matt. xxv. 31—46.

greatness, Jesus replied,—“Seest thou these great buildings?” Short-lived indeed is their splendour! “The days will come,” and are not far distant, when the Romans will reduce her to a heap of ruins, and “there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”* Peter and James, John and Andrew, were deeply impressed with this awful prediction, which involved so many dreadful calamities; and inquired, privately, what would be the signs of her impending destruction. He answered that it would be preceded by “wars and rumours of wars,” political revolutions, false Christs, and false prophets, earthquakes, pestilence and famine. But that “the Gospel must first be preached to all nations,” in the dissemination of which they would have to sustain persecution, be “delivered up to councils and into prisons, and brought before kings and rulers for his sake;” promising them that the Holy Spirit should inspire them what to say when called upon to speak in their own defence, and admonishing them to possess their souls in patient dependance on his special protection. He described the sufferings of the Jews during the siege, as more dreadful and intense than had ever been experienced by any nation “since the beginning of the world, or ever shall be;” and directed that when the Christians beheld the Roman standard

* Josephus relates, that “in magnitude, some of them were forty-five cubits long, and broad in proportion.”

planted in the sacred enclosure, they should "flee to the mountains," that a remnant might be preserved, while the unbelieving Jews were "falling by the edge of the sword," or were being "led away captive into all nations."

"Devoted city! from thy woes in vain,

Thy glance upturn'd to heaven for rest entreated,

Say—didst thou then bethink thee of the stain,

The guilt of which thy measured crimes completed,

On Him thy hands had crucified and slain?"

Jesus likewise predicted the various changes and revolutions which will precede his second advent, many centuries after the tribulations of Jerusalem have passed away. "Signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars," are to be the indications of his near approach; *i. e.*,—revolutions in states and kingdoms, schisms and divisions in churches, and vicissitudes among kings and statesmen. "Upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth;" while his messengers are actively engaged in gathering in the elect, with a great sound of the Gospel trumpet. And since the day and hour of his descent from heaven, is known only to God, He commanded all men to be watchful and constant in prayer, "lest coming suddenly, He find them sleeping." *

* Matt. xxiv. 1—24. Mark xiii. 1—14. Luke xxi. 5—24.

Three days afterwards, on "the first day of the feast of unleavened bread," the disciples inquired, "Where they should celebrate the passover?" In reply, Jesus despatched John and Peter into the city, to a place where He told them they would "meet a man with a pitcher of water," directing them to follow him to his house, and to say who had sent them; upon which he would "show them a large upper room, furnished" for his express accommodation. Everything transpired accordingly. Their next proceeding, therefore, was to purchase a spotless lamb, and to carry it to the court of the temple for slaughter, to have its fat burnt, and the altar sprinkled with its blood. It was then roasted whole, and placed at midnight on the table, with bitter herbs, unleavened bread of the finest flour, and a dish of thick mixture, composed of dried figs and dates, called charoteth.*

The red light had now gleamed over Jerusalem, touching it with the last gleam of sunset, and the purple and vermilion which shrouded the hills, were sinking into the darkness of the most deeply affecting night ever witnessed either by men or angels. Jesus was painfully conscious that the hour of his sharp and excruciating soul-travail was fast approaching. And it is not unlikely, that awful evening was passed in his accustomed retreat—the garden of Gethsemane. However that might be, as midnight

* Luke xxii. 7—13.

approached, He repaired to the upper room with a heavy yet willing heart, and calmly placed himself at the mournful table, with John by his side, the rest of the disciples seating themselves in due order. And never before nor since, was there so touching a banquet as that at which the true Lamb of God then presided, under the banner of his everlasting love. Looking round with his own peculiarly mild and benignant expression of Divine tenderness and affection, He assured them that this his last passover, was what He had ardently longed to celebrate, as the almost closing scene of his earthly life, which He was about to sacrifice as an atonement for sin, and thus annihilate that festival, and all the types and shadows, by which redemption-work had been hitherto prefigured.

Judas Iscariot listened to the pathetic words of the Saviour, with his heart full of treachery, and still bent on the accomplishment of his base and execrable engagement. Not so indifferent was the mind of Jesus, at the thoughts of the awful doom this apostate disciple was entailing on himself, but "troubled in spirit," He exclaimed to them all, in a tone of deep feeling,—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” They started with surprise and dismay at the awful announcement, and anxiously looking at each other, enquire, which of them could be capable of doing so dreadful a deed of darkness? The

warm-hearted, impulsive Peter was deeply moved, and made signs to John,—who, while supporting himself on his left elbow, was leaning on his Master's bosom, —to ask Him who could be the wretched miscreant? Then all together looking earnestly at Jesus, they cried out in a sorrowful, deprecating tone, "Lord, is it I?"—Judas hypocritically re-echoing the question, to cover his base intention. Casting a penetrating look of reproach on the latter, Jesus solemnly answered, "Thou hast said." Then replying to the whispered interrogation of John, by a sign, He soaked a piece of lamb or bread in the charoteth, and gave it to Judas, with the omniscient admonition,—“That thou doest, do quickly.” These words had no sooner escaped his lips, than Satan entered into the traitor, to urge and direct the blackest crime he had ever instigated, since he fell from his first estate of an innocent and happy angel. Thus possessed by the personal enemy of Jesus, who, though conquered in the wilderness, had not relinquished his hope of gaining the victory, Judas went out in the obscurity of a gloomy night—a fit season for the accomplishment of his infernal purpose.

Disregarding the sorrows and sufferings which awaited Him, and contemplating only their bright and blessed result, Jesus exclaimed, as the traitor quitted the room,—“Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be

glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." He then proceeded to institute his Gospel-supper, which would henceforth supersede the feast of the passover, and be a perpetual memorial of the sacrifice He was about to make of Himself, as the Lamb slain in the counsels of heaven, before mankind was created. "And as they did eat, Jesus took the bread," and lifting up his eyes with devout affection to the Father, "blessed and brake it," and gave to the disciples, saying, "Take eat, this is"—that is, represents—"my body" which I will offer for your transgressions. "And He took the cup" of blessing, adding, "when He had given thanks,"—"This is"—that is, represents—"my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many. Take and divide it among yourselves; for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Thus embodying in the most pathetic manner, the Divine scheme of redemption in his holy supper.

Then addressing the eleven with a paternal affection, He said, "Little children, yet but a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me; and as I said unto the Jews, whither I go ye cannot come; so now I say unto you." For there is not even an angel in the universe capable of entering the path in which I shall travel back to heaven, so bedewed will be with the blood of anguish, so strewn with sharp

thorns and prickly briars! He then exhorted them to adjust their affection for each other by his example, and to let love for the brethren be henceforth the badge of his disciples;—an evidence that they have passed from a death in trespasses and sins, into a state of spiritual vitality.

The idea of a separation from his beloved Master, was an intolerable calamity to the ardent Peter, who in an agony of fear, cried out,—“Lord, whither goest thou?” Jesus replied only by a mysterious prediction of the similar mode of martyrdom, by which his own life would be terminated.—“Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards.” He had yet to learn by sorrowful experience, his own weakness and deficiency in moral courage, and the instability of his own best intentions. In warm-hearted sincerity and attachment, he inquired, “Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.” Turning on him a piercing look of mistrust and tender reproach, Jesus assured him that the cock would not crow twice at early dawn, before he thrice denied all knowledge of Him. The other apostles joined in the same expression of love and fidelity, and received the appalling assurance,—“Ye shall all be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.” Commiserating Peter for the more special temptations which awaited him, He

declared that though He would fall, yet through his intercession He should rise again triumphant over the enemy. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee; that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." *

Observing their distress and sadness at the idea of a separation, He tenderly poured out the sweetest promises for their consolation, with an affectionate admonition of the expediency of his return to heaven, to secure for them an everlasting inheritance. "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if not I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas replied,—“Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” Jesus explained Himself to be the guide thither, the teacher of truth, and the source of life eternal, without whom they could never “know” God in his essential nature and gracious attributes. Then, in allusion to his indwelling Godhead, He added, “If ye had known me, ye should have known also; and from henceforth ye know Him, seen Him” in me, for I am the express
10—29. Luke xxii. 28—34. John xiii. 31—38.

image of his person. This was at present incomprehensible language to Philip, who said,—“Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” Jesus further explained the mystery, that He was Himself one with the Father, who co-operated in his miracles, and promised after his return to heaven, to pour upon them a plenary infusion of the Holy Ghost, to enlighten their minds with a perfect understanding of the work of redemption, to inspire them to preach his Gospel, and to empower them to confirm its truth by miracles. And besides He graciously added,—“I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you” after my resurrection, and prove my triumph over death and the sepulchre.*

He directed the disciples to offer their prayers henceforth through Himself as their Intercessor, and promised the peculiar manifestation of his presence to their souls, in a manner that could not be vouchsafed to the worldly and unconverted. Jude Thaddeus, not understanding Him, inquired into the nature of this special favour, and was assured, that He—the Son and the Father—would abide in the hearts of all who, out of love to God, obeyed his commandments. He also bequeathed as a perpetual legacy, his own incomprehensible peace, flowing from the pardon of sin, and assurance of everlasting salvation, to afford them comfort in affliction. Still they were dismayed and cast down, at the thought of a separa-

* John xiv. 1—20.

tion from so beloved a Master: but Jesus assured them, they had rather cause to rejoice in his return to the Father, who, though his equal as God, was "greater" as touching his manhood. "Hereafter," said He, "I shall not talk much with you, for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."* He will find me invulnerable to his worst temptations, but I submit to them, "that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment so I do. Arise, let us go hence." The feast being concluded, they sang the last hymn, and Jesus arose from the table, and followed by his disciples, "went out into the Mount of Olives with stedfast purpose of heart," to fulfil his magnanimous yet dreadful engagements.

* John xiv. 22—31.

CHAPTER X.

“Go to dark Gethsemane,
Ye that feel the tempter’s power,
Your Redeemer’s conflicts see,
Watch with Him one bitter hour;
Turn not from his grief away;
Learn of Jesus Christ to die.”

PASSING out of the city, through the gate since called Saint Stephen’s, along the outside of the eastern wall, Jesus descended by a steep, rocky, and winding path, into the valley of Jehoshaphat,—still pouring into the hearts of his disciples the most heavenly consolations. Adverting to the vines which overspread the ground and hedges, He compared himself to those luxuriant shrubs; and his people, who were mystically united to Him, to the branches, deriving their spiritual life and fruitfulness out of his infinite plenitude, yet requiring frequent pruning by the chastening hand of the Father. He assured

them at the same time of the infinite strength of his affection, adding, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." Yes, the suns and planets may cease to revolve in their orbits, and vanish away, but his affection for his people is inextinguishable, and will endure for ever. Again preparing their minds to suffer persecution for the sake of his Gospel, He gave them a renewed promise of the Comforter, and concluded his affecting discourse with an injunction, that all prayer should henceforth be offered through Him, as their High Priest and Mediator, expressing much sympathy in their sorrow. "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

He then manifested his dependance on the Father, as the man Christ Jesus, in a most sublime prayer for the exaltation of his humanity to the throne of his eternal Godhead, and the reunion of all his redeemed with Him in his everlasting glory; supplicating that, as there exists a reciprocal community of possession between Himself and the Father, so his affinity to them, by a participation of their flesh, might be a means of bringing them into a near relation to God, as their reconciled Father. With what soul-thrilling sensations must the apostles have listened to his soothing discourse to themselves, and his ardent
- for their eternal interests! *

* John xv., xvi., xvii.

They now reached the bridge over the brook Kidron, which then ran with a full and rapid current through the valley, and carried off from the temple the blood of the sacrifices. Ascending the lower part of Mount Olivet, which was then covered with groves of the sacred tree, Jesus turned in silent resignation into an inclosed garden belonging to the village of Gethsemane,—a lonely and secluded spot in the cleft of a glen, to the shades of which He had often been accustomed to retire,—and which He was now pleased to render the scene of his mysterious agony, under the burden of his people's imputed transgressions. Pointing to the ledge of a rock, within a stone-throw of a grove of olives, He directed the disciples to sit there, while He passed the doleful hour of his soul-travail. Then taking with Him Peter, James, and John into the grove, He kneeled down, and while praying earnestly, submitted to the transfer of all our sins, "for upon Him was laid the iniquity of us all," as our everlasting Surety, that He might pay the debt we had so unhappily contracted to Divine holiness and justice. A full cup indeed was now put into his hand which must be drained to the last dregs, while his pure and innocent nature shrank from the nauseous mixture, and He almost sank under the intolerable burden of human transgression. In the prophetic language of David, the sins now imputed to Him "took hold of

Him so that " He was "not able to look up." They were so innumerable, that his "heart failed Him." * Their yoke was "bound upon" Him; they were wrapped over Him as a thick mantle, and wreathed upon his heavenly brow like the sea-weeds which encircled Jonah's head, when he was in the depth of the mighty waters:—

"Great High Priest! we view thee stooping,
With our names upon thy breast;
In the garden, groaning, drooping,
To the ground with horror prest.
Weeping angels stood confounded,
To behold their Maker thus;
And can we remain unwounded,
When we know 'twas all for us?"

In sore amazement and heaviness of spirit, He turned towards Peter and the sons of Zebedee, and with a countenance of inconceivable anguish and pallor, exclaimed,—“My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me. And He went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed,” in excruciating mental torture, “O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless,” since there is no other method of salvation, “not as I will,”—flesh and blood shrink from the pollution,—but, “if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done!” All the waters of affliction can never drown my zeal

* Ps. xl. 12.

for thy glory, nor can the floods of thy wrath against sin quench my love for perishing sinners.

In the midst of his tremendous conflicts and unparalleled sufferings, the tender-hearted Saviour remembered the three disciples whom He had brought to witness them, and found them lying on the ground in a merciful, deadening kind of slumber, induced by the tears they had shed at the soul-harrowing spectacle of his agony. Gently reminding Peter of his recent vehement profession of love and fidelity, He said, "What, could you not watch with me one hour?" But, in excuse of his apparent apathy, He added, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." Such, indeed, is human frailty: it was well that their perceptions were in some degree benumbed by drowsiness, for surely angels must have shrunk from the awful spectacle which was then displayed. Turning from them, He once more fell prostrate to the earth, and again, wave upon wave of his Father's wrath against sin, rushed impetuously over Him; and again, in his innocent aversion to the wormwood and the gall poured into the cup of expiation, He cried out in the anguish of his mind, "If it be possible!" but the words were no sooner uttered, than acquiescence in the Father's will, and his everlasting love for perishing sinners, triumphed over human repugnance to pain and mental suffering. Satan presented to Him the strongest temptations he could devise, but his poisoned arrows only

recoiled upon himself, and he was as completely vanquished in Gethsemane, as he had been in the wilderness of Quarantina. For his Divine conqueror had "put on righteousness as a breastplate," and "on his head the helmet of salvation," and had clad himself in "the garments of vengeance," and with "zeal as a cloak." Single-handed, and uncheered by the smiling presence of his Father, He "trod the winepress alone," and successfully combated the adversary. "And being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood," forcing themselves through the pores of his skin "and falling down to the ground" in copious streams of life-giving efficacy. And never was there so awfully conspicuous a display of the malignity of sin, as in the excruciating agony which the just and holy One endured as the sinner's Surety. From the transcendentally exquisite structure of his frame, as well as his moral perfections, He was peculiarly susceptible, both of bodily and mental anguish. Every nerve was strained and injured, every fibre crushed, as He agonized under the burden of imputed sin and iniquity. Amazing convulsions must have passed over his system, when blood oozed from it in such abundance. Soul and body have separated under such intolerable unprecedent sufferings, had not the Father sustained him when his physical powers were entirely

"Dispatch'd from heaven an angel stood,
Amar'd to find Him bath'd in blood;
Ador'd by angels, and obey'd;
But lower now than angels made.

"He stood to strengthen, not to fight:
Justice exacts its utmost mite:
This victim vengeance will pursue,—
He undertook and must go through.

"Mysterious conflict! dark disguise!
Hid from all creatures' piercing eyes;
Angels astonish'd view'd the scene,
And wonder yet what all could mean."

His strength being thus invigorated, Jesus rose from the ground, and approaching his disciples, said, "Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand!" They awoke at the sound of his well-known voice, and prepared with the rest to follow his footsteps.

Then He advanced to meet Judas and the band of soldiers. For as He well knew, they were at that moment descending the steep hill-side, their lanterns and torches gleaming, and their swords and staves glittering in the distance. "Knowing all things that should come upon Him," He approached the captain, with a determination to yield himself up as his prisoner, saying, "Whom seek ye?" upon which Judas rushed forward, gave Him a kiss as the signal before agreed on, while treacherously saluting Him with, "Hail, Master!" Jesus received him with a reproof so mournful, and gentle, as must have cut

him to the heart, had he not rendered himself incapable of being renewed unto repentance. But lost to every good feeling, and intent only on obtaining the wages of iniquity, he charged the guards to "hold Him fast,"—perhaps, apprehensive lest He should escape by a miracle. The captain said, that it was "Jesus of Nazareth" whom they sought; and with calm resignation to a voluntary surrender of himself, He replied,—“I am He.” Overawed by the holiness and dignity of his manner and appearance, all the soldiers, with their officers and Judas, were seized with terror, drew back, and “fell to the ground,” as struck with a thunder-bolt; thus fulfilling David’s prophecy,—“When the wicked, even mine enemies, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.” *

When they had in some degree recovered from their panic, the guards bound Jesus with chains and fetters, not, it may be supposed, without fear and trembling, but constrained by obedience to the ruling authorities. The impetuous nature of Peter was roused to a high pitch of anger, at the indignity thus offered to his beloved Lord, and drawing his sword, he aimed a blow at Malchus, the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear, to avenge his officiousness in the capture. But Jesus restored the
ted organ, and rebuked Peter for his rashness.

est thou not,” said He, “that I cannot now

* Ps. xxvii. 2.

pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Then meekly expressing his disapprobation of the dastardly means resorted to by the Sanhedrim, to accomplish their malevolent design against One whose whole life had been innocent and beneficial to mankind, He stipulated with the captain for the safety of his disciples, and willingly allowed himself to be led away as his prisoner.

"Forth from the garden fully tried,
Our bruised Champion came,
To suffer what remain'd beside—
Of pain, and grief, and shame."

CHAPTER XI.

“ Follow to the judgment hall,
View the Lord of Life arraigned;
Oh, the wormwood and the gall!
Oh, the pangs his soul sustained!
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss,
Learn of Him to bear the cross.”

THE soldiers conducted their willing captive along the path beneath the eastern wall, and up the ascent of Mount Zion, to the house of Annas, on the hill of Evil Counsel, where they found the infatuated conspirators convened together, and anxiously expecting their victim. But as Caiaphas, the head of the guilty conspiracy, was high priest that year, they adjourned to his palace. He was already prepared with suborned witnesses, and immediately proceeded to the trial, endeavouring, in the first place, by insidious reasoning concerning his doctrine, to constrain Jesus to condemn himself. He answered, with his characteristic calmness and equanimity, “ I spake openly to

the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the Temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret I have said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I have said." An officer, who stood by, to guard him, irritated by his calm self-possession, and implied, conscious innocence, "struck him with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the High Priest so?" The insult was received with only a gentle remonstrance against the injustice of such treatment. Caiaphas next charged Him with a design to destroy the Temple, and of blasphemy; then of instigating the people to rebellion against the national tribute imposed by the Roman Emperor, which the witnesses he had bribed, endeavoured in vain to substantiate, so contradictory were all their depositions. This malicious investigation served only to prove his spotless innocence, as the Lamb of God, whose unblemished nature, according to the law of Moses, was to be ascertained before it was sacrificed. Dismayed and confounded by his heavenly and peaceful demeanour during the examination, Caiaphas started up, with instinctive but transient fear, lest he should really be the Messiah, and at once asked, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus answered, in a firm voice, "*I am.*" I stand before you veiled in the garb of humanity, as my Father's willing servant, and intend, by submitting to the

none." Peter and John, however, had not been able to refrain from following Him at a convenient distance to the palace of Caiaphas. John, being known to the high priest, "went boldly into the council chamber" during the trial; the less courageous Peter remaining outside in the porch, until he had made interest with the damsel who kept the door, to grant him admittance. Chilled by the heavy dews of the early morning, Peter approached a fire, which had been kindled in the centre of the hall, and as he stood among the people who surrounded it, another portress recognised his person, and taxed him with being a disciple of Jesus. In great dismay, he denied all knowledge of Him, and hurried out into the porch, just as the dawn was announced by the shrill crowing of the cock, and found himself in contact with another woman, who renewed the accusation. Again he denied the charge with an oath. But a relation of Malchus, who had probably seen him in the garden with Jesus, affirmed that his dialect proved him to be a Galilean, and one of his disciples. Peter, now losing all his moral courage, and fearing lest he should be taken into custody, began vehemently to curse and to swear, and positively denied for the third time all knowledge of his divine Master. Again the cock was heard to crow, and Jesus, who was standing on a raised platform before the tribunal of Caiaphas, opposite to the entrance of the palace, turned round, and cast a look of mournful reproach

and wounded affection upon the faithless Peter. Struck to the heart, as he recollected his Lord's recent prediction, and awakened to an appalling sense of his ingratitude and falsehood, he hastened away, overwhelmed with shame and contrition, to some retired spot, and in an agony of self-reproach and grief, wept bitterly, and bewailed his sin with sincere repentance.

It had not yet been the policy of Rome to deprive any tributary nation of its laws and privileges, but the Sanhedrim, having been lately removed from the council chamber, adjoining the priests' court, in the Temple, where only it was lawful to judge capital crimes, Caiaphas determined to refer the trial of Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. He was, therefore, conducted in chains to his residence, called the Pretorium, in the strong and extensive fortress of Antonia, which stood on a rock at the north-west corner of the Temple area, communicating with the court of the Gentiles, and divided on the north by a deep trench, from the suburb of Bezetha. As it was the feast of unleavened bread, the hypocritical priests, while their hearts were burning with malice and envy against their innocent victim, refused to enter the judgment-hall, "lest they should be defiled" by contact with the heathen. Pilate, therefore, was constrained to respect their scruples; but suspecting them of baseness and in-

came outside the balcony, and said, in a

repulsive tone, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" Offended and irritated by so cool a reception, they retorted, "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him unto thee." Pilate looked at the heavenly Lamb of God, as He stood, surrounded by the "fat bulls of Bashan," and instinctively shrank from the office Caiaphas and his accomplices were endeavouring to impose on him. His first impulse was to reject their appeal, and he recommended them to "judge Him" according to "their own law." This they refused, objecting that the crimes of blasphemy and of disaffection to the Empire did not belong to their jurisdiction. However reluctantly, therefore, Pilate was constrained to yield, and the divine Saviour was conducted into his presence.

Just as he was commencing the examination, he was interrupted by a messenger from his wife, whom she had dispatched in much fear and anxiety, to conjure him in her name to avoid implicating himself in the machinations of the Jews against the life of an innocent man, concerning whom she had that morning suffered much in a dream. Her admonition was in perfect accordance with his own impressions, but political considerations prevailing over his better feelings, he went on with the trial.

The first charge adduced against Jesus, which the confederates expected would have the greatest weight

with Pilate, was that of disaffection to the Roman empire, and of assuming "that He Himself" was "a king." Persuaded that He was no ordinary person, Pilate conceived that He might, possibly, be the legal heir to the throne of Judah, although the monarchy had been long since abolished. He, therefore, put the question to Him, saying, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" To his great astonishment, Jesus had hitherto remained silent while the suborned witnesses were giving evidence against Him, but now He meekly replied, "Thou sayest that I am, a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Struck with his heavenly dignity and conscious innocence, and overawed by the divine mystery which seemed connected with the case before him, Pilate exclaimed, "What is truth?" and immediately hurried out into the balcony in great agitation, and energetically protested aloud his conviction, that "there was no fault in Him." But the conspirators were only the more fierce, and clamorously insisted that He was a demagogue, exclaiming, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place."*

Devoid of sufficient moral courage, to act upon his own conviction that Jesus was innocent of all the

* Matt. xxvii. 11—14; Luke xxiii. 1—5; John xxiii. 28—38.

charges adduced against Him, Pilate, on ascertaining that He lived under Herod's jurisdiction, sent Him to that prince, who he hoped would relieve him of the responsibility of his acquittal or condemnation. The multitude followed the Divine prisoner to the royal palace, and stood outside, in the Xystus, with the whole band of hostile priests, to wait the result of the examination. The tyrant was well pleased to behold the extraordinary man, whose mighty deeds he had heard so greatly applauded, and of whose miraculous power he expected in vain to witness a specimen. But, enraged by the silent, calm, and dignified attitude in which He stood before him, and confronted his enemies, he grossly insulted Him, and deriding his pretensions to be a king, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe of mock royalty, and returned Him to Pilate, who still vacillated between his desire of pronouncing an acquittal, and his fear of offending the influential priests and rulers. With a characteristic mixture of justice and injustice, he endeavoured to conciliate their angry and inflamed minds, by proposing to inflict upon their innocent victim a milder punishment than death, of which He was undeserving, and then to discharge Him. Hoping they would acquiesce in his iniquitous, time-serving desire, he caused the Divine Lamb of God to be conducted to an elevated pavement of mosaic work, called Gabbatha, and scourged with wanton and hard-hearted barbarity. His people's transgressions

had been transferred to Him in Gethsemane, therefore He placidly and meekly "gave his back to the smiters" for their salvation, that "with his stripes they might be healed." Then with insolent mockery and scorn, the soldiers having divested Him of his scarlet robe, in which Herod had arrayed Him, they exchanged it for one of royal purple, in the same wicked and sarcastic spirit; and twisting into a crown the prickly branches of the rubus,* which was then in blossom, encircled his sacred head with the cruel garland, the thorns of which sharply piercing his heavenly brow, pained Him most acutely. Then placing a reed in his right hand, in imitation of a sceptre, they assailed Him with savage blows and bitter irony,—little suspecting his real dignity, as King of kings and Lord of lords,—

" Whose glory never shone more bright,
Than when by trembling friends abandoned,
Thy foes insulting homage rendered;
Then did admiring angels see
Divine forbearance, Lord, in thee."

Continuing to waver between hope and fear, Pilate caused the lacerated "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief" to be led to the balcony over the arch, still called the Arch of Ecce Homo; and, as a last resource, endeavoured to excite the compassion of the multitude by his heartrending

* Calmet.

appearance, as He stood exposed to their gaze, with "his countenance more marred" and furrowed "with grief than the face of any other man." Anxious to make an impression on the multitude, Pilate addressed them in an imploring tone, and besought their pity. "Behold," said he to them, "I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him." But their stony hearts were unmoved, and they "gaped upon Him with their mouths as a ravening and roaring lion, ready to devour Him," for "their eyes were" so judicially blinded, "they could see no beauty in Him, to desire Him" as their Messiah.* He confronted his enemies with the broad stamp of every Christian grace and heavenly virtue upon his pierced brow and pallid countenance, immovable as a rock assailed by the pelting storm and lightning's flash, with every human perfection blended in his Divine person. His obdurate foes presented a full personification of every evil passion incident to fallen humanity. Little did they think that ere long He would exchange the feeble reed which He held in his powerful and benevolent hand, for a sceptre of universal dominion,—his purple robe of scorn and contempt for bright transparent garments of light and glory, and his crown of thorns for many diadems! They were unconscious that He was the Son of God, and, instigated by the priests and rulers, they unanimously "cried out, Crucify,

* Ps. xxii. 13 ; Isai. liii. 2.

crucify Him!" Die. He must,—a victim to their blind fanaticism and fury!

Disappointed in his hope that their hearts would be touched at the sight of such unparalleled affliction, Pilate proposed returning Him upon the hands of the Jewish authorities, without either acquittal or condemnation. But they clamorously objected, exclaiming, "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." Familiar with the notion of an occasional descent to earth of the pagan deities, Pilate fearing lest the accusation should prove a true one, returned in great trepidation to the judgment-hall, and resumed his examination, but "as a lamb before his shearers is dumb so He opened not his mouth." As a judge, Pilate remonstrated against this incomprehensible silence, "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Jesus meekly replied, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above, therefore he that delivered me unto thee" (Caiaphas), "hath the greater sin." His apprehensions concerning his heavenly origin being still unremoved, Pilate again sought to release Him. It was an annual custom, during the Passover festival, to emancipate a prisoner chosen by a majority of the people. He therefore presented to their choice Jesus and Barabbas—a noted assassin and insurrectionist, conceiving it im-

possible they could prefer such a character to the innocent man whom he had in vain endeavoured to acquit. But they peremptorily insisted on the release of Barabbas, roaring out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." Alarmed lest he should be accused of disaffection to the jealous Emperor Tiberius, who punished political crimes with death, he anxiously inquired, "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" With one voice the whole multitude cried out, "Let Him be crucified." Again he remonstrated, but popular tumult prevailed over his better feelings, and policy constrained him to yield, however reluctantly. Thus was fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy, concerning the implication of the Romans in the death of the Divine Author of life, light, and salvation, "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen."*

According to the law of sacrifices, the victim was to be presented at the door of the tabernacle, that it might be seen to have no blemish. Pilate, therefore, testified that the Lamb of God, now doomed to be slain, was pure and spotless. Ordering a bowl of water to be brought to the balcony, with deep indignation against the Jews for constraining him to perpetrate so infamous a deed, he expressively

* Lam. iv. 20.

“washed his hands” before them, “saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” The infatuated multitude answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” An awful imprecation, which has now clung to their posterity for more than eighteen centuries. With reluctant steps Pilate then slowly ascended the marble eminence, called Gabbatha, and, with time-serving culpability, pronounced the awful sentence on Jesus, and “delivered Him to their will.”* Thus he entailed a truly merited retribution upon his own guilty head, and did not escape the disgrace he endeavoured to avoid so unjustly. Ten years afterwards he was deprived of the government of Judea on account of malpractices, and, like Judas, died by his own hand at Vienne, in Gaul, the place of his banishment.

* Matt. xxvii. 24, 25; Mark xv. 6—11; Luke xxiii. 22—25.

CHAPTER XII.

“ Calvary’s mournful mountain climb,
There adoring at His feet,
Mark that miracle of time,
God’s own sacrifice complete :
‘ It is finish’d,’—hear the cry ;
Learn of Jesus Christ to die.”

THE iniquitous sentence of death having been passed by the unjust judge, the soldiers divested the Son of God of his mock insignia of royalty, clothed Him in his own raiment, and led Him away to the place of execution. Under their guidance the Divine Man of Sorrows advanced with suffering steps, (but a willing mind, bent on the fulfilment of his eternal engagement,) through the judgment-gate, along the steep and rugged *via dolorosa*, followed by the heartless crowd, and their still more heartless instigators. Many Galilean women, who had clung to Him with admirable constancy through his various trials, attended the mournful procession, weeping and

lamenting the cruel and tragical death He was doomed to suffer; and among them was Mary, his mother, pierced to the soul with a two-edged sword of maternal affliction. The guards, fearing from his evident lassitude and physical exhaustion, that their progress would be retarded, constrained one Simon of Cyrene* to bear up the extremity of the cross, which, with wanton barbarity, had been placed between his lacerated shoulders, already bowed to the earth with the ponderous load of transferred human transgression. Overwhelmed as He was by his own sufferings, it pierced his soul to the quick to hear the heart-broken sobs and sorrowful exclamations of the women behind Him. Turning his head round, He cast upon them a look of tender commiseration, and sought to divert their grief concerning Himself, to the woes which awaited their own guilty nation. "Daughters of Jerusalem," said He in a tone of pathos and sympathy, "weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" †

The sad and solemn procession moved on till it reached the north-west outskirts of Jerusalem, where

* Mark xv. 20—22.

† Luke xxiii. 26—31.

stands Mount Calvary, on the swell of Acra. For to "sanctify the people with his blood," the Lamb of God must needs "suffer without the gate." On this eminence, therefore, the cross was placed, and He voluntarily resigned Himself to be laid on it as on the altar of expiation, meekly stretching out his gracious hands to receive the cruel nails, and patiently enduring the torture, while the executioners were fastening Him on the ignominious instrument of punishment. Raising his eyes to heaven, He did but exclaim, in his own truly Divine and benevolent spirit, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" They were heathens, acting under orders, as servants to the Empire, and little suspected Him to be "Jehovah's salvation," for both Jew and Gentile, "to the ends of the earth." The greater sin rested with Caiaphas and his iniquitous party. His awful crucifixion had been graphically foretold by Zechariah, "And one shall say unto Him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."* When this unspeakable gift of God was fast bound with cords to the cross, it was lifted up on the place of skulls, where the unburied remains of criminals were sometimes exposed; and on each side of the infinitely philanthropic Saviour, nearly opposite to Him, two thieves were crucified at the same time, to increase his ignominy, the three crosses forming a triangle. Thus,

* Zech. xiii. 6.

according to Isaiah, "He was numbered with the transgressors." *

With a view to make known the equity of their government, the Romans had a custom of proclaiming to the world the name and crimes of the person whom they condemned to death; sometimes by the voice of a herald preceding the culprit to the place of execution, and at other times by publishing it on a placard fixed over his head. On this occasion, Pilate caused a large tablet to be placed above the cross of Jesus, with the superscription inscribed in large and conspicuous characters, in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS," that it might be understood by the foreigners who were in Jerusalem from Parthia, Media, Persia, Egypt, and Arabia, as well as by the Jewish people. This title virtually recognised Him as the heir of the throne of Judah. The priests were therefore displeased, especially as it conveyed an implied censure on their own baseness and injustice. Self-condemned, they implored Pilate to alter the inscription; but, provoked with them for implicating him in their cruel scheme, he refused them with well-merited contempt, "What I have written I have written." Thus he unconsciously attested to the world, in the three principal languages of the Empire, the sovereignty of "the Lord our Righteousness."

Near to the cross stood Mary, overwhelmed with

* John xix. 16—18; Isai. liii. 12.

maternal anguish, and by her side John the Evangelist, deeply participating in her sorrows, and mourning with her over the heartrending spectacle which Calvary then presented. Jesus compassionated his unhappy mother; and, with a peculiar consideration for her future comfort, consigned her to the care of his beloved disciple, in perfect confidence that he would protect and console her with filial regard, till death should dismiss her into the realms of glory. Looking affectionately at her, He said, with an emphatic meaning which they both understood, "Woman, behold thy son." Then, turning his eyes towards John, He added, "Behold thy mother; and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own house,"* and she is said to have died in his home at Ephesus.

Meanwhile the infatuated multitude, and still more guilty priesthood, taunted Jesus with his miracles of mercy, and insultingly challenged Him to prove that He was the Son of God and the King of Israel, by rending asunder his cords and descending from the cross unscathed by its torture,—“He saved others, himself he cannot save.”—“All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing that He delighteth in Him.”† One of the thieves joined in their blasphemous revilings; but the other,

* John xix. 25—27.

† Ps. xxii. 8.

penetrated with a deep persuasion that He was the Son of God, and touched to the heart by the strength of redeeming love manifested in his seraphic fortitude and meekness, reproved his companion's daring impiety. "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." Then in the fullness of his own heart-felt trust in Jesus as the Saviour of sinners, he turned towards Him a look of repentance and faith, casting himself upon his mercy, with a firm belief in his approaching exaltation. He probably had some knowledge of the prophecies concerning Him as a King and a Priest upon his heavenly throne, and cried out in an imploring manner, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into thy kingdom." Jesus responded to his supplication by an assurance of salvation, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."* And this first trophy of his cross is a perpetual monument of rich, free, sovereign grace to the penitent sinner; even when life is fast ebbing away, and the soul is on the brink of eternity.

The four executioners who had nailed the Lamb of God to the accursed tree were, meanwhile, intent only on dividing his garments, as their customary perquisite. Unwilling to rend his seamless robe, they decided whose it should be by lot, as David had

* Mark xv. 31, 32; Luke xxiii. 39—43.

prophesied, "They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots." Some of the soldiers, however, with more concern for the anguish depicted on his countenance, offered Him wine mingled with myrrh to deaden his sufferings. But He refused the proffered alleviation, having no desire to mitigate or abate one jot of his excruciating expiation.*

During the last three hours of his agony on the cross, and deep mental anguish, an awful darkness covered the land of Judea. For the great luminary of day, as it were in horror of human wickedness, withdrew its beams behind clouds of the blackest hue, and of unusual density.

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in;
When God the mighty Maker died,
For man the creature's sin."

While this supernatural darkness lasted, the light and joy of his Father's countenance were eclipsed, and the consolations of his presence suspended. As the surety of sinners, enduring the full transfer of all their sins, He must pay the utmost fraction of the debt which had been contracted to Divine justice,—though, as a Son, He was never more the object of his Father's love, than in the dire and solemn moments of expiation. But this absence of his smile was a bitter stroke to his loving heart, drove the iron

* John xix. 23, 24.

deeper still into his soul, and wrung from his wounded spirit that bitter, dolorous cry,—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me; so far from the words of my roaring? My strength is dried up like a potsherd, my tongue cleaveth to my jaws. Thy rebukes have broken my heart.”*

At the ninth hour, which was the time of the evening sacrifice, the dying Lamb, knowing that one only passage of Scripture remained to be accomplished concerning his atonement, said,—“I thirst.” A sponge filled with vinegar was immediately put on a stem of hyssop, and raised to his lips. He received it with the triumphant exclamation,—“It is finished!” and bowing his head in token that his death was voluntary, like a conqueror retreating with immense spoil from the field, He cried with a voice that penetrated heaven, earth, and hell, and proclaimed that Satan was vanquished,—“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Then, yielding up his soul as a sin-offering to God, it winged its flight to paradise, precisely at the hour when the evening lamb was being sacrificed in the temple,—the substance coinciding with the shadow.

“’*T is finish’d*—so the Saviour cried,
And meekly bow’d his head, and died:
’*T is finish’d*—yes, the race is run,
The battle fought, the victory won.

* Ps. xxii. 1, 15.

"' *Tis finish'd*—all that heaven decreed,
And all the ancient prophets said,
Is now fulfilled as was design'd,
In me the Saviour of mankind.

"' *Tis finish'd*—this my dying groan,
Shall sins of every kind atone;
Millions shall be redeem'd from death,
By this my last expiring breath."

Prodigies attended the death of the holy Saviour. The land of Judea was convulsed with an earthquake while his holy soul was being presented to the Father as a sin-offering. Mount Calvary and the adjoining rocks were split asunder, and the sepulchres burst open, and many of the departed saints arose from the bed of death, after his resurrection, and appeared to their friends in the holy city. The temple heaved and shook to its foundation. The veil of the holy of holies was rent from the top to the bottom, and disclosed to open view the cherubim and the mercy-seat,—thus signifying that the way into heaven was now opened through the veil of Christ's lacerated flesh, which that beautiful curtain symbolized,—“The covering cast over all nations” was virtually “destroyed, and the rebuke of God's people” taken away.* Inanimate nature evinced an emotion, at the humiliation and sufferings of its Creator, which infatuated man—the noblest work of his hands—had shown himself incapable of feeling.†

* Isai. xxv. 7, 8.

† Matt. xxvii. 45—52.

"The rocks can rend, the earth can quake,
The seas can roar, the mountains shake;
Of feeling all things show some sign
But this unfeeling heart of mine.
To hear the sorrows thou hast felt,
Might cause the very stones to melt;
But I can read each wondrous line,
And nothing move this heart of mine.
Eternal Spirit—mighty God,
Do thou apply the Saviour's blood;
'Tis his rich blood, and his alone,
Can melt and move this heart of stone."

It affords some relief to the dark picture of human depravity, that the Roman centurion and his quaternion, who were on duty, "watching Jesus," were seriously impressed by his peaceful, holy, and heavenly demeanour, and by the prodigies which attested his Divine nature. "They feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." A conviction which was most probably strengthened by the preaching of the glorious Gospel throughout the empire. "And all the people who believed in Him, and the women who came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned to their homes with weeping and bitter lamentations." *

* Luke xxiii. 47—49.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Angels, roll the rock away;
Death, yield up thy mighty prey;
See, He rises from the tomb,
Rises with immortal bloom."

THE law of Moses allowed no one to hang on a tree after sunset, and as it was on the eve of a passover-Sabbath that Jesus made his soul a sacrifice for sin, the Jewish rulers, who were strictly scrupulous concerning ceremonial observances, demanded of Pilate, that his corpse and those of the two thieves might be taken down from their crosses. Pilate acquiesced in their desire, and gave orders to the soldiers to remove them. They had the precaution to ascertain that they were all quite dead, and "brake the legs of the two malefactors, but overruled by an invisible power, they touched not the sacred feet of the Lamb of God," that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "a bone of Him shall not be

broken." Instead of testing his death by the ordinary process, one of the soldiers plunged a spear into his side, which penetrating the pericardium, wherein water is always lodged, would have cut asunder the last thread of life had He not been "dead already." "And forthwith, came thereout blood and water," flowing from a heart of infinite compassion and sensibility, broken with grief, and crushed with the burden of imputed sin, transferred to Him as the surety of sinners.*

Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable and wealthy senator, innocent of the crimes of the Sanhedrim, and a secret disciple, possessed a residence, or at least some landed property near to Mount Calvary. In a garden belonging to him there, was a rock of solid stone, mound-like in form and appearance, wherein he had recently caused a tomb to be hewn out, and lined with marble. He is said to have been "waiting for the kingdom of God," and resolved to bestow on his crucified Lord a suitable interment in this new sepulchre. Having great influence with the Governor, he went boldly to him "and craved" the precious "body." Readily disposed to gratify him, Pilate immediately inquired of the centurion, "whether He had been any while dead?" and on being answered in the affirmative, gave orders that his remains should be committed to Joseph. Having thus obtained permission to per-

* Ps. lxix. 20.

form the last pious offices for the slain Lamb, with the aid of his friend Nicodemus, he carried the sacred corpse into his garden, and depositing it on what is called the stone of unction, profusely anointed it with myrrh and aloes, and carefully swathed it in bandages of fine linen, wound a napkin round his pierced temples, and then bore Him through the ante-chamber into the inner sepulchre of the tomb, "wherein never before was any man laid." With heavy hearts and tears of grief and affection, they deposited their lifeless Saviour in a sculptured marble sarcophagus, that the precious corn of pure wheat which had been so cruelly bruised for sin, might lie like seed in the grave, to be the root of an abundant harvest of souls raised in glory and immortality. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Joses, and the Galilean women, who had been unable to tear themselves away from his cross, were present at this sad and touching funeral, and when it was over, returned "weeping" with heartfelt sorrow into the city, prepared spices and ointments, and rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment, resolving on the following morning, to revisit his tomb and sprinkle Him with perfumes.*

On "the day after the preparation," the infatuated priests and Pharisees made application to Pilate, although it was the Sabbath which they professed to observe so strictly; "saying, Sir, we remember that

* Mark xv. 42—47.

deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first." Pilate answered, "Ye have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as you can." Having thus obtained an order from the Governor, they hastened to the garden, examined the tomb, and satisfied themselves that the body of Jesus was deposited in the sarcophagus. But, on rolling back the stone portal against the entrance, they discovered that it did not fit closely into the jambs, and caused it, therefore, to be sealed with the Emperor's signet. They next stationed guards in the ante-chamber, and placed sentinels in the surrounding adjacencies, to impede every access to the sepulchre.* †

Nevertheless, the third morning after the entombment of Jesus was ushered in by an appalling confirmation to the soldiers, that He had raised Himself to life by his own quickening power. A second shock of an earthquake occurred. The ground heaved to and fro under their feet, and an angel, arrayed in garments white as snow, walked through the ante-chamber, broke the seal of the stone portal, rolled it back, and sat down upon it, his countenance beaming with exultation.

* Calmet.

† Matt. xxvii. 57—66.

" Vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Christ hath burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids his rise,
Christ hath open'd Paradise.

" Lives again our glorious King,
Where, O Death, is now thy sting?
Once He died, our souls to save;
Where's thy victory, O Grave?"

Trembling with terror and amazement, the guards rushed out of the ante-chamber, fled in inconceivable agitation to the Sanhedrim, "and showed the chief priests," to whom they were responsible, "all things that were done." Those hypocrites refused to credit their report, though they must themselves have felt the shock of the earthquake, which they probably referred to natural causes. Before they would permit the soldiers, however, to quit the Senate,—fearing the effect their narrative might have on the public mind, they deliberated on the best means of screening themselves from the charge of injustice and cruelty. After some consultation, they decided on giving each of them a large sum of money to seal their lips, offering the bribe with an injunction to give out that the "disciples" of Jesus "came by night and stole Him away;" to which they added the crafty assurance, "If this come to the Governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were

taught; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”*

But to return to the Saviour's glorious resurrection. Simultaneously with the portentous earthquake, his human soul, obedient to the summons of his own quickening power, had winged its flight back from the world of spirits, and reuniting itself to his majestic body, reanimated it, and awakened Him from the stern embrace of death, in which He had peacefully slumbered. Sweet, indeed, had been his sleep unto Him, for He felt in his loving heart, that He could henceforth look round upon his redeemed, and say, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” Ministering angels, who were waiting in attendance, with songs of praise, joyfully unwound the swathes of fine linen, which encircled Him, removed the fillet from his head, folded them up and laid them each in separate places. The Divine Conqueror then issued forth in calm and satisfied triumph from the sarcophagus, exhibiting death for ever disarmed of its sting, and divested of terror. At the same moment, “many of the saints which slept arose” from their icy beds among the rocks which had been rent asunder by the earthquake, “went into the Holy City, and appeared unto many.” “Thy dead shall live; together with my dead body

* Matt. xxviii. 11—15.

shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs."*

On this triumphant morning, "while it was yet dark, Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb," and discovered that the stone portal had been removed. She hastened, in grief and amazement, to John and Peter, exclaiming, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him." Then, returning to the sacred spot, and bedewing it with her tears, "she stooped down, and looking" mournfully "in, saw two angels in white, sitting the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." They inquired the cause of her grief, and, having explained it, she "turned herself back," and her eyes fell on the adorable object for whom she was so bitterly mourning. But she was too much absorbed in sorrow to observe Him particularly; and, besides, as it was still dusk, He was not clearly visible. He spake to her with kindness and sympathy; but, taking Him to be the gardener, a hope sprung up in her mind that He would be able to assist her in recovering possession of the body. Therefore, with her streaming countenance still riveted on the sarcophagus, she replied, "Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him." What, then, must have been the revulsion of her feelings, when the tender accents of his well-known

* Matt. xxviii. 2—4; Isaiah xxvi. 19.

voice saluted her ears, and He said, "Mary!" with his own peculiar, unmistakeable emphasis? How sweetly must that concise salutation have vibrated on her heart, and with what joyful surprise must she have responded, "Rabboni!" Falling prostrate to the ground, she was about to embrace his feet, and worship Him as her God and Saviour, but He commanded her to postpone her homage. "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Delay me not now. There will be other opportunities to express your faith and love; for I shall not immediately return to heaven.*

"Grief and sighing quickly fled,
When she heard his welcome voice;
Just before she thought Him dead,
Now He bids her heart rejoice.
What a change his word can make;
Turning darkness into day!
You who weep for Jesus' sake,
He will wipe your tears away."

The beams of the rising sun had just begun to touch the golden front of the temple, when Mary, the mother of James; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Salome, and other women, were on their way from Jerusalem with their sweet spices. As they walked mournfully on, they discussed by what means they could obtain the removal of the

* John xx. 1—17.

heavy stone portal,—being ignorant that it had been rendered inviolable by the Roman seal and signet. But when they reached the sepulchre, they beheld it wide open, and, to their great terror and amazement, an angel seated on the huge stone. Aware of the pious and affectionate nature of their errand, he endeavoured to soothe their minds by words of kindness: “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said; come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Thus graciously invited to examine the evidences of his resurrection, they entered the inner tomb and found the sarcophagus empty, and while they were regarding each other in great perplexity, “two men” appeared before them “in shining garments.” With increased trepidation they bowed their faces to the earth, while they listened to the glorious communication, which those celestial beings uttered in a sweet sonorous tone of joy, “He is not here, but is risen; remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” They “remembered his words instantly, and lifting themselves up,” and looking towards the sarcophagus, beheld on the right side of it “a young man clothed in a long white garment,” who confirmed the statement of the angels, adding, “Go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as

He said unto you." They obeyed, and ran quickly towards the city, with mingled feelings of hope and fear, when lo, the Saviour himself met them with the gracious salutation, "All hail!" There was no mistaking his pleasant soul-penetrating voice, or his identity as "the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely." They could not doubt the evidence of their senses, as He stood before them, with the scars visibly imprinted on his pierced hands, his hair parted in the midst of his head, and waving below his neck as the Nazarite of Nazarites, with his own love-inspiring, benignant countenance. The women, still trembling with astonishment and perturbation, fell prostrate at his feet, while He graciously calmed their agitation; and then, to intimate the affinity into which He had brought his redeemed, dismissed them with an injunction to tell his brethren "to go into Galilee, where they should see Him." *

* Matt. xxviii. 1—10; Luke xxiv. 1—8.

CHAPTER XIV.

“The first-begotten from the dead,
Lo! Jesus ris’n, his people’s head,
To make their life secure;
They too, like Him, shall yield their breath,
Like Him shall burst the bands of death,
Their resurrection sure.”

THE apostles, clinging together in their affliction, were mutually lamenting their sad bereavement, when the women entered among them, with joy and solemnity depicted on their countenances. Mary Magdalene had already communicated her blessed discovery to John and Peter, who, though “her words seemed to them as idle tales,” ran to the tomb to ascertain the truth of her statement. John was the first to reach it; and, “stooping down and looking in,” with a scrutinizing glance, he discerned that the sarcophagus was empty, and the fillet and linen bandages lying where they had been deposited by the angel. He then went in, accompanied by

Peter, to examine the inexplicable mystery, for as yet they understood not the statements of Scripture, and what Jesus had told them concerning his resurrection.

While the disciples continued in desponding unbelief, brooding together over their loss, Cleophas, Mary's brother-in-law, and the father of James and Jude the Less, was returning in a like disconsolate spirit to the village of Emmaus, accompanied by another disciple, who shared in his grief and disappointment. On the way, they conversed upon the all-engrossing topic of Christ's ignominious crucifixion, which had nipped in the bud their fondly-cherished hopes of deliverance from the dominion of the Romans, and while thus engaged, they were unconsciously joined by the risen Saviour, as one travelling by the same road, who inquired the subject of their conversation, and why they appeared so melancholy and downcast? They were too much absorbed in their feelings to regard the supposed stranger with any particular attention, and besides, "their eyes were holden that they should not" recognise Him. Cleophas expressed amazement at his apparent ignorance of the unjust and cruel death of so eminent a prophet as Jesus of Nazareth, which had lately transpired at Jerusalem, since it had created a great sensation, and filled many hearts with sorrow. He likewise alluded to the women's evidence, which would have been irresistible, had they not been blinded by ignorance and prejudice.

Jesus, in reply, upbraided "their slowness of heart to believe the prophets," to whom He referred them as having described his expiatory sufferings, and foretold his re-entrance into glory. When they reached the house of Cleophas, He bade them farewell, and was about to proceed further; but the two disciples had been so refreshed, and enlightened, by the gracious doctrines which distilled from his lips like evening dew upon the parched-up herbage, that they were unwilling to lose his company. They therefore constrained Him to come in and partake of their hospitality, and during the repast, He revealed Himself by his own peculiar manner of "breaking bread, and then instantly vanished out of their sight," leaving them in a state of indescribable astonishment. They now discovered that they had "unawares entertained" One who was above all angels, and recalled to mind "how their hearts had burned" with fervent affection, while He unfolded the great prophetic scheme of redemption.*

Late as it was, they were too full of joy at their happy discovery, to contain themselves in silence till the following morning. They therefore, without delay, returned to Jerusalem, to communicate what had transpired to the apostles, and found them all together, Thomas excepted, with closed doors, lest they should yet fall into the hands of their enemies. But neither locks nor bars could shut out the risen Saviour. While Cleophas was relating his wonderful

* Luke xxiv. 13—32.

story, "Peace be with you," sweetly echoed through the room, in such accents of love, as no other man could utter. Startled at the well-known sound of his heavenly voice, the disciples simultaneously turned their eyes to the spot from whence it proceeded, and lo! to their amazement, there stood the Lord, in his majestic body, which had been so barbarously "wounded in the house of his friends," and pierced with the spear of the Roman soldier. Unprepared by their incredulity for this glorious reappearance of Him whom their soul loved, they stood panic-smitten and aghast, "supposing they beheld a spirit," and not his corporeal presence. With his wonted affability and condescension to their weakness, He reasoned with their fears, and afforded them palpable evidence of his identity, by submitting the scars on his hands and feet to a tangible examination; "And while they believed not for joy, and wondered," He gave another proof that He was "alive again," by eating "a piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb." Having now "opened their understandings," to comprehend the prophecies relating to the work of redemption, He commanded them, not altogether to leave Jerusalem, till they had been anointed with the Holy Ghost to preach his Gospel, and breathed on them, as an earnest of the Pentecostal effusion.*

When Thomas was made acquainted with the reappearance of Jesus, he expressed his incredulity

* Luke xxiv. 33—49; John xx. 19—22.

in strong and vehement language, insinuating that his brethren were carried away by some illusion of the imagination, or that they had seen an immaterial spirit. He continued in this sceptical frame of mind, till at the expiration of a week, when they were all together, with the doors fast closed against intruders, Jesus once more stood in the midst of them, uttering his blessed salutation. And on this occasion He broke the solemn silence which ensued, by addressing Thomas exclusively. Extending towards him his hands, He directed him to examine the evidences he demanded, and even to thrust his own hand into the side which had been opened by the spear of the Roman soldier. This implied knowledge of his expressions of unbelief, produced instant conviction, that the nature of Jesus was Divine as well as human, and in an ecstasy of joy and satisfaction, he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" For the consolation of all who live by faith and not by sight, Jesus replied, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." *

Full of faith, and with more enlightened views concerning their Lord, the eleven now repaired as they had been directed, to a mountain in Galilee, near the sea of Tiberias. Doubts and fears arose in their minds for an instant, when Jesus first reappeared to them there, till reassured by his gracious words and Divine bearing.

* John xx. 24—29.

With more lucid apprehensions of his twofold nature, they again worshipped Him as God, while He confirmed their belief in Him as such, by asserting that his Father had delegated all power to Him, both in earth and heaven. He directed them to commence the preaching of his Gospel at Jerusalem, and from thence to extend it through the length and breadth of the Roman empire. And to impress on the minds of their converts, that salvation flows from the joint love of the triune Jehovah, He commanded them to "baptize all nations" in the one name of "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," promising his presence and support with both ministers and people, till time shall be swallowed up in eternity. And to themselves especially, He gave the power of speaking in new languages, and of working miracles, declaring that they should be invulnerable to the poisonous assaults of Satan.*

During their sojourn in the mountain of Galilee, seven of the disciples embarked on a fishing excursion, and were out at sea all night without the least success, which must have been a great disappointment, as in that retirement they probably depended much on fish for their sustenance. As they were returning to land, just as the sun was gilding the adjacent hills with the first morning beams, they discerned a human form on the beach, whom they did not suspect to be the Saviour, till, addressing

* Matt. xxviii. 16—20; Mark xvi. 17, 18.

them with the endearing appellation of "children," He inquired if they had caught anything? On being answered in the negative, He directed them to cast a net on the right side of the ship, implying that they would be rewarded for their trouble. They instantly obeyed, and a multitude of large fishes rushed in, and rendered the net so heavy, it was with difficulty dragged to the shore. When John beheld the miracle, he exclaimed, in a tone of surprise and pleasure,—“It is the Lord!” Peter seizing the idea, hastily put on his fishing-coat, leaped into the sea, and waded to the shore to worship his beloved Saviour. When the net was fairly stranded, Jesus condescendingly invited them to dine in his presence, a fire of coals being ready kindled, fish laid thereon, and bread prepared. While He graciously ministered to them with his own hands, they ate in solemn silence, knowing instinctively that He was the Lord; but none daring “to ask, Who art thou?” or to make any observation. There was that in his aspect since his return from the invisible world, which subdued the familiarity that subsisted between them before his crucifixion. As intimate friends they had been used to share in his meals, to walk with Him through fields and groves, on the hills and in the valleys, in the desert and on the highway, and to sail with Him upon the smooth sea, and on the stormy billows. But now there was more reserve in his deportment,

a tone of higher authority in his language, and a more profound mystery in his actions, though love was ever the all-pervading principle. After the repast, He tenderly reminded the self-confiding Peter of his moral weakness, by the thrice-reiterated question,—“ Lovest thou me ? ” His already wounded conscience was touched to the quick, by this implied doubt of his sincerity, and he answered with emotion,—“ Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.”

“ Do not I love thee from my soul ?

Then let me nothing love ;

Dead be my heart to every joy,

When Jesus cannot move.

“ Is not thy name melodious still,

To mine attentive ear ?

Doth not each pulse with pleasure bound,

My Saviour's voice to hear ? ”

To prove that He knew the extent of his love, Jesus commissioned him to supply the lambs of his flock with suitable nourishment. He likewise foretold the indubitable evidence he would finally display of his fidelity and affection, by undergoing a cruel martyrdom for the sake of his glorious Gospel. And when his missionary work was completed, in the reign of Nero, he sealed his testimony with his blood, and was crucified,—it is said,—with his head downwards, considering himself unworthy to die precisely in the posture in which his Divine Master expired on Mount Calvary.

CHAPTER XV.

" See the heaven its Lord receives !
Yet He loves the earth He leaves ;
Though returning to his throne,
Still He calls mankind his own.

" Still for us He intercedes ;
His prevailing death He pleads ;
Near Himself prepares our place,—
Harbinger of human race."

WHEN forty days had elapsed after his resurrection, Jesus "led" the eleven "out to Bethany," to witness his ascension from the declivity of Mount Olivet. Still clinging to the notion of the immediate establishment of an earthly dominion, they ventured to ask, if He designed "at this time to restore again the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, indirectly, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Through the illuminating influences of the Holy Comforter, they would soon understand the spiritual

nature of the Gospel dispensation, and at length be reunited to Him, in the place He was going to prepare for them, in one of his Father's many mansions. When they reached the spot from whence He was to ascend, He "lifted up his hands," and pronounced a blessing on them, as their High Priest, about to enter the celestial sanctuary, with his own atoning blood of sprinkling. Then, rising perpendicularly from the green turf on which they stood, He majestically ascended up through the atmosphere into the ethereal regions, and disappeared amid the dazzling splendours of the cloud, which usually attended on the presence of the Godhead.

They remained with their eyes riveted on the firmament, in a stupor of amazement, till roused by two attendant angels, who had tarried below to assure them of his second personal coming, in a like visible manner. Prostrating themselves to the earth, they immediately worshipped Him as God, and "returned to Jerusalem with great joy," full of zeal for his glory, "and were continually in the temple praising Him" for his great salvation, till they received the promised Comforter.

The glorious ascension of Jesus fulfilled David's prophecies concerning his triumphant return to the bosom of his Father, and the inauguration of his victorious humanity upon the throne of his supreme Godhead. The Psalmist describes his angelic escort, invoking in celestial choruses, the portals of

heaven, to open for his admission, with their jubilant responses,—“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory?” The Son of God,—“the Lord” of salvation, strong and mighty in battle, “dragging the captor captive in chains of darkness at his chariot wheels, with his head” mortally “bruised,” and his powers and principalities despoiled on the mountain of expiation. “The Lord is gone up with a shout” of victory, “the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises unto our King, sing praises with understanding. For the Lord most high is terrible” to his enemies; “He is a great King over all the earth.”*

Jeremiah's and Daniel's predictions concerning his enthronement as a King, a Priest, and a Mediator, also received their accomplishment, for then did the true heir of Judah's sceptre transfer it to the heavenly sanctuary. “David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel. Neither shall the priests, the Levites,” his ransomed people, “want a man before me to offer burnt-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.”† “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came in the clouds of heaven, to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him. And

* Ps. xxiv. 7—10; xlvii. 5—7; lxxviii. 18.

† Jer. xxxiii. 17; xxx. 2.

there was given Him a dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and tongues should serve Him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." *

"Crown the Saviour! angels, crown Him!
Rich the trophies Jesus brings;
In the seat of power enthrone Him!
While the vault of heaven rings—
Crown Him, crown Him,
Crown the Saviour King of kings.

"Hark, those bursts of acclamation!
Hark, the loud triumphant chords!
Jesus takes the highest station:
O what joy the sight affords!
Crown Him, crown Him,
King of kings, and Lord of lords."

During John's exile in the isle of Patmos, by the Emperor Domitian, he beheld, in a vision, the exalted Saviour enthroned in majesty and glory; his humanity transparent with similar effulgence and beauty as had been manifested on the mountain of transfiguration, and encircled with the prismatic-coloured rainbow—the symbol of covenanted love and faithfulness. And as this glorious arch is formed in the sky, by sunbeams refracted from the watery clouds, so when the Sun of Righteousness shines upon the tearful penitent, mercy and peace are blended together, like the variegated hues of the

* Dan. vii. 13, 14.

semicircle in the firmament. Four-and-twenty elders surrounded the Redeemer's throne, representing the whole Church triumphant, arrayed in robes washed in the precious blood of atonement, crowned with golden diadems, and uniting with the celestial intelligences in ascriptions of honour, praise, and power to the Lamb as the holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty. *

“Behold the glories of the Lamb,
Amidst his Father's throne;
Prepare new honours for his name,
And songs before unknown.”

As an evidence of his Divine omniscience, the glorified Saviour revealed to John an outline of the vicissitudes and persecutions to be endured by the Church militant during the Gospel dispensation, recorded on seven volumes of parchment rolled and sealed one over the other. For all governments, both in nature and providence, grace and glory, are his. And though He maintains in their orbits the suns and planets which revolve in the ethereal regions, and upholds the whole material creation, He ever sits supreme at the helm of the evanescent kingdoms and states of this world, fulfilling the high designs of his mediatorial empire. He overrules the schemes and contrivances of the senate and the council-chamber, and not unfrequently the circumstances of the family circle; blending them in

* Rev. iv., v.

the machinery of his providence, and moving them in harmony with his supreme wisdom, by secret springs of too fine and complicated a nature to be discovered by human penetration. All events and their contingencies are thus rendered subservient to the grand object of the Divine incarnation, viz.,—to rid the intellectual universe of sin and Satan, suffering and mortality. The God-man

“ Reigns : his throne is high ;
His robes are light and majesty ;
His glory shines with beams so bright,
No mortal can sustain the sight.
His terrors keep the world in awe,
His justice guards his holy law ;
His love reveals a smiling face ;
His truth and promise seal the grace.
Through all his works his wisdom shines,
And baffles Satan’s deep designs ;
His power is sovereign to fulfil
The noblest counsels of his will.”

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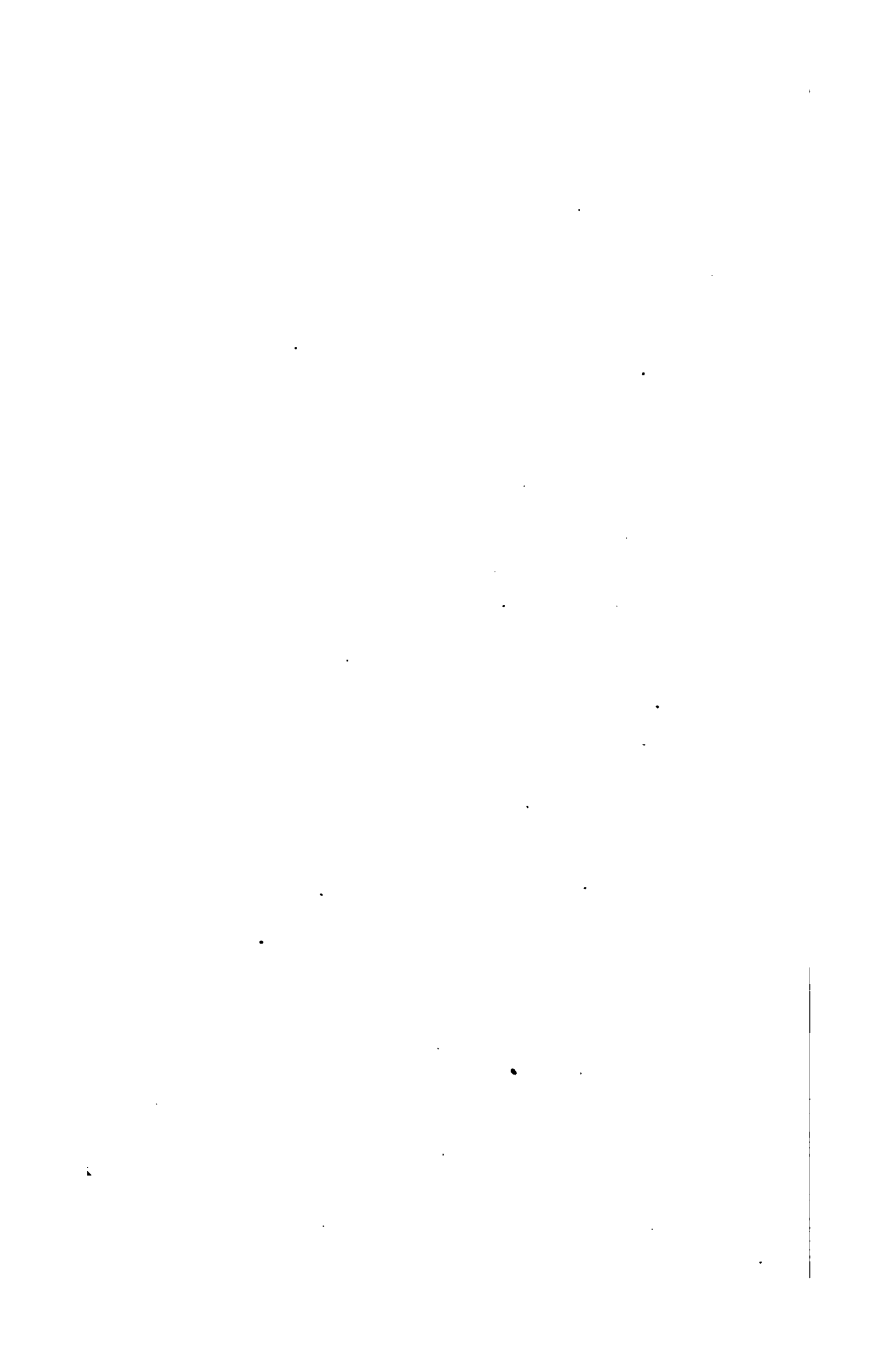
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